FUJILOVE

ALL THINGS FUJIFILM X AND GFX

124 / July 2026

Capturing a Sense of Place

In conversation with Jess Ellis

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THE FUJIFILM X-PRO3 WAS NEVER MEANT FOR EVERYONE

Take Kayo

TAKE'S CORNER

The Fujifilm X-Pro3 was announced back in 2019, which feels like a lifetime ago. I've been shooting with the camera (even before it launched), using it through my travels, daily photography, YouTube work and personal projects. Over the years, I've used many other cameras, including newer and technically superior models, yet the X-Pro3 remains one of the few cameras I return to consistently. It's not the most practical camera Fujifilm has made, but it represents a very different philosophy from that of most digital cameras.

When the X-Pro3 first launched, much of the conversation focused on the hidden rear LCD screen. For many photographers and reviewers, it immediately became controversial. Some called it unnecessary. Others saw it as Fujifilm intentionally making the camera worse. But looking back now, I think many people fundamentally misunderstood the purpose of the camera itself. The hidden screen was never an anomaly; it was the main feature.

For those who primarily view digital cameras as electronic devices, any deviation from the standard template is immediately seen as a flaw or mutation of the norm. The expectation is that every new camera should move toward a homogenised endpoint: same convenience, same accessibility, same features. But not all cameras should behave the same way, much like not all vehicles should behave the same way.

A two-seat convertible isn't lacking a roof or rear seats. By its very nature, it's not supposed to have a roof or rear seats. That's precisely what makes it special. Nobody looks at a Porsche Boxster and complains that it can't carry seven passengers. The limitations are inseparable from the experience itself. The X-Pro3 adheres to that same philosophy.

In the digital era, Leica explored this idea through the limited edition Leica M Edition 60, followed by the serial production M-D Typ 262, the M10-D and now the M11-D. For over a decade now, Leica has consistently maintained the idea that not every digital camera needs to revolve around a rear LCD screen.

That's the hardcore interpretation of the philosophy. No playback. No constant image review. No visual safety net. The photographer is expected to trust instinct, timing and experience.

Fujifilm approached the idea differently. The X-Pro3 still gives photographers access to the LCD when needed. Playback remains possible. Menus remain available. But because the rear screen is folded inward by default, the camera introduces just enough friction to interrupt the modern habit of constant image review. It doesn't forbid chimping. It simply makes it inconvenient enough that many photographers naturally stop doing it as often.

That small inconvenience changes behaviour. Instead of immediately dropping your eyes downward after every frame, you remain in the scene slightly longer. You continue observing. You anticipate rather than verify. The optical viewfinder reinforces this feeling further. The experience becomes less about consuming images immediately after capture and more about remaining engaged with the act of seeing itself.

In some ways, I actually think Fujifilm found the more balanced compromise. Leica's LCD-less digital cameras are philosophically pure, but the X-Pro3 feels more sustainable for everyday long-term use. It nudges rather than dictates. It encourages restraint without becoming dogmatic.

What fascinates me most, almost seven years later, is how memorable the X-Pro3 remains despite the relentless pace of camera releases since 2019. Modern cameras have become increasingly homogenised. Nearly every manufacturer (including Fujifilm) is pursuing the same goals: faster autofocus, better video, more creator-oriented features and more convenience. The cameras themselves are extraordinary, but they feel increasingly designed to satisfy everyone equally. The X-Pro3 refused to do that; it specialised in experience rather than universality.

Over time, I stopped thinking about the camera's specifications entirely. During my travels, especially in places like Hong Kong, the X-Pro3 gradually disappeared into the rhythm of observation itself. I reviewed images less. I paid attention more. The camera altered not only how I photographed but how I moved through environments. It encouraged patience in visually overwhelming places. I often paired the X-Pro3 with my Leica M7 film camera as my shooting behaviour remained

consistent between these two cameras.

As I now look toward the future of the X-Pro series, I honestly hope Fujifilm continues leaning into what made the X-Pro3 different in the first place. Whether the next camera ends up being called the X-Pro4 or perhaps even the X-Pro6 to align with the sixth-generation sensor and processor, Fujifilm should resist the temptation to turn the X-Pro series into just another hybrid camera competing in the same space as everything else.

For instance, the reverse LCD should remain. It's part of the identity of the camera now. That doesn't mean Fujifilm can't improve it. The mini rear screen could be backlit and easier to read, and the ribbon mechanism itself could certainly be strengthened for long-term durability. But removing the reverse LCD entirely would fundamentally change the character of the camera.

In addition, if Fujifilm removed video entirely from the X-Pro series, it would make the camera even more focused and photo-centric. Sure, I appreciate the X-Pro3's video capabilities when needed, but at the same time, the X-Pro series has never really been about content creation or influencer culture. It's meant for photographers. The camera's design, titanium construction, optical viewfinder and overall shooting experience all point toward that identity already.

Moreover, rather than trying to broaden the appeal of the X-Pro series, Fujifilm should narrow it even further. Keep the titanium build. Lean harder into the design and physical experience of the camera. Make it feel distinct from the rest of the X Series lineup. Not every camera needs to appeal to everyone.

The X-Pro3 worked because Fujifilm committed to an idea and followed through with it, even knowing some photographers would reject it. The future of the X-Pro series depends on Fujifilm having the confidence to continue doing exactly that, instead of slowly turning it into something more conventional. Thanks for reading and happy shooting!

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LIGHT, STONE & SHADOW: A PHOTOGRAPHER'S *Field Guide* TO SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE

Rick Halpern

iPhone 15

It is six o'clock in the morning and the cobblestones of Calle Aldama are empty. The street lamps are still on, casting long amber pools across the uneven stones, and above you, the neo-Gothic towers of the Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel are beginning to catch the first grey light of dawn. In an hour, this narrow street will be one of the most photographed spots in Mexico – tripods jostling for position, tour guides marshalling groups past the iron-grilled windows and influencers staging their 10,000th version of the same shot. But right now, at this hour, it belongs entirely to you and your camera.

This is the essential paradox of San Miguel de Allende as a photographic destination. It is simultaneously over-photographed and inexhaustible. The city's historic centre (a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2008) has been shot from every conceivable angle by every type of photographer, and yet it continues to yield new images, new light and new human moments to anyone willing to work with patience and intelligence. After five days of daily shooting throughout the city, I returned home with several hundred images I was genuinely happy with. This does not happen everywhere.

What makes San Miguel work as a photographic environment is a convergence of factors: extraordinary colonial architecture in an intact historic core, a warm, high-altitude light that is both dramatic and forgiving, a street life that layers tourists, expats, working locals and a thriving arts community into the same narrow streets, and a calendar of religious and civic processions that can turn any ordinary afternoon into a festival of colour and costume. Most of the best shooting is within a 30-minute walk of the central Jardin.

This is not a general travel guide. It is a working photographer's field manual, drawn from five days of intensive street shooting, organised around the practical questions that matter most: where to go, when to go, what to bring, how to handle the light, when to shoot colour and when to commit to black and white, and how to make portraits of strangers in a place where the camera is an accepted but not always welcome presence.

X-T5 + XF27mmF2.8 at f/7.1, 1/420 sec, ISO 125

BEFORE YOU GO

Every article about San Miguel tells you to bring a good camera and a wide-angle lens. Almost none of them tells you the most important piece of equipment: proper shoes. The historic centre is built on steep hills, and every one of its streets is paved with irregular colonial cobblestones that look picturesque in photographs and feel like a medieval torture device after hours of walking. You will cover up to 20,000 steps a day on inclines, while managing a camera bag, watching for light and keeping your eye on the street. The right choice is a low hiking boot or trail-running shoe with ankle support and a grippy sole, broken in before you arrive.

Before leaving home, spend an hour building a personal map in Google My Maps or Apple Maps. Drop pins for your primary shooting locations (e.g., Jardin Allende, Calle Aldama, Calle Jesus, Calle Umaran, El Mirador, Parque Juarez and the two main markets) and download an offline map. Cell coverage in the narrow streets of Centro can be inconsistent and you don't want to be consulting a spinning loading wheel when the light is perfect.

GEAR

I came to San Miguel with three lenses for the Fujifilm X-T5: the XF27mmF2.8, XF35mmF2 and XF50mmF2. After five days, the pattern was unambiguous: the 27mm was on the camera approximately 80% of the time.

On the X-T5's APS-C sensor, the 27mm gives a field of view equivalent to approximately 40mm full-frame – a classic street focal length wide enough to include significant environmental context without barrel distortion, yet tight enough to give human subjects genuine presence in the frame without requiring antisocial working distances. In the narrow colonial streets, where many alleyways are no more than three metres wide, this balance is not merely aesthetic; it is practical. The 27mm is also small, inconspicuous and quick to raise, and in street photography, the moment between seeing and shooting is everything.

The XF35mmF2 was most useful for low-light evening work around the Jardin and for environmental portraits where slight background separation helped the subject read against a busy backdrop. The 50mm proved largely redundant: the working distances it requires simply do not exist in most of San Miguel's streets. I used it once from a rooftop and left it in the bag for the rest of the trip. If I were to return, I would leave it at home entirely.

X-T5 + XF27mmF2.8 at f/ 7.1, 1/70 sec, ISO 125

LIGHT: THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT VARIABLE

In San Miguel, light matters more than in almost any other city I have photographed, because the quality of the light does not change gradually over the course of the day but shifts sharply at a precise threshold. Below that threshold, the light is extraordinary. Above it, it is brutal.

San Miguel sits at approximately 1,900m above sea level. The thin, clear atmosphere means the sun rises sharply and intensifies quickly, giving you a photographic golden window of roughly three to three and a half hours, from about 30 minutes before sunrise until approximately 9.45am to 10am. In the blue hour before sunrise, the light is cool, even and shadowless – ideal for long exposures of empty streets and stripped-down architectural geometry. As sunrise arrives, warm amber rakes across the city from the east, catching the upper stories of buildings while leaving the street-level cobblestones in cool shadow. The north-south streets running south of the Parroquia, particularly Calle Aldama, Calle Jesus and Calle Umaran, are exceptional at this hour. The pastel facades respond to raking light with an intensity they never achieve under flat midday sun.

By 10am, the light has begun to harden. By 10.30am, it has crossed a threshold beyond which colour street photography becomes a struggle against blown highlights and impenetrable shadows. On three of my five shooting days, I was back at my accommodation by 10.30am, editing the morning's take and resting through the worst of the midday light, and back on the street by 4pm as the second golden window opened. Many photographers spend their most energetic hours shooting in conditions that will defeat them. The city rewards the photographer who structures their day around the light rather than imposing their schedule upon it.

iPhone 15

X-T5 + XF27mmF2.8 at f/9, 1/1400 sec, ISO 250

There is, however, an important qualification. Harsh midday light, while destructive for colour, is extremely productive for black and white. The same overhead intensity that bleaches colour creates something remarkable in monochrome: extreme tonal contrast, sharp shadow geometry and bold graphic structure, such as a doorway throwing a perfect black parallelogram across pale cobblestones or a figure stepping from deep shadow into blinding sunlight. Some of my best photographs from San Miguel were made between 11am and 1pm, all in black and white, exploiting the quality of light that the colour photographer correctly avoids.

The second golden window opens from approximately 4.30pm and lasts until sunset. The evening light is different in character from the morning: warmer in tone, lower in angle and softer in quality. Calle Umaran, running west from the Jardin, receives the setting sun directly along its length, gilding the cobblestones and creating long, soft shadows from figures walking uphill or downhill. The evening Jardin is full: families promenading, vendors selling corn and flowers, musicians under the laurel trees and the Parroquia's towers catching the last golden light. Both the pre-dawn solitude of Calle Aldama and the social warmth of the evening Jardin are essential. Both reward the photographer who shows up with patience and an open eye.

COLOUR VS. BLACK AND WHITE

The temptation in San Miguel is to shoot everything in colour; the city is drenched in saturated ochres,terracottas, cobalts and magentas that seem purpose-built for the camera. However, colour can become visually exhausting and it needs to earn its place. Colour works when the palette itself is the subject: painted doors, market stalls, bougainvillaea against a yellow wall and the Jardin at dusk, where warm lamp light mixes with cooler blue-hour sky. Strip away the colour from those compositions and you lose the essential visual information.

But street portraits in cluttered backgrounds and shots fundamentally about geometry, shadow or the relationship between a figure and an architectural surface are almost always strengthened by the removal of colour. The eye goes directly to form, light and expression. Make colour justify its presence. If an image works equally well in black and white, it probably should be black and white.

X-T5 + XF27mmF2.8 at f/8, 1/55 sec, ISO 250

iPhone 15

X-T5 + XF27mmF2.8 at f/10, 1/100 sec, ISO 125

THE STREETS

San Miguel is small enough to walk end to end in 40 minutes but photographically dense enough to reward five full days of concentrated shooting. The core Centro circuit (Calle Aldama, Jesus and Umaran radiating from the Jardin) is the postcard stretch and deservedly so, but the parallel streets see mostly locals and are far less contested. Work this area pre-dawn to mid-morning for raking light and empty streets, and return after 5pm for golden hour and night scenes with street lamps glowing against a darkening sky.

The markets (Mercado Ignacio Ramirez and Mercado de San Juan de Dios) offer some of the most authentic photographic opportunities in the city. The 27mm lens is non-negotiable in these close quarters. Buy something first; you shift from observer to participant and that changes the social dynamic entirely. Don't overlook the processions either (Catholic feast days, quinceañera celebrations, school parades, etc.). Work ahead of the procession, find a corner or doorway, hold your position and let it move through your frame. Trying to follow from behind produces shots of the backs of heads.

X-T5 + XF27mmF2.8 at f/9, 1/60 sec, ISO 125

X-T5 + XF27mmF2.8 at f/10, 1/350 sec, ISO 250

STREET PORTRAITURE

San Miguel is generally a permissive environment for street photography, but respect and judgment are non-negotiable. The 27mm on the X-T5 is small, quiet and unintimidating, which matters enormously. Pre-focus at a hyperfocal distance so you can shoot without hunting for focus. Move deliberately rather than sneaking; a calm, unhurried presence is far more effective than furtiveness. For sustained environmental portraits (e.g. a vendor at her stall, an old man on a bench or a family in the Jardin), asking briefly with a gesture and a smile usually produces more relaxed and interesting results than a stolen shot. Photograph with respect and you will rarely encounter objections.

A FINAL REFLECTION

San Miguel de Allende is not a difficult city to photograph; it is almost suspiciously cooperative. The light is reliably beautiful, the architecture endlessly photogenic and the streets dense with visual incident. And yet, after five days of shooting, what becomes clear is that the city rewards patience and specificity over opportunism. The best images are not the ones you grab on your first walk down Calle Aldama. They are the ones you wait for on your third or fourth return, when you understand the light, when you know the rhythm of foot traffic and when you have learned to see past the obvious frame to the quieter, more honest moment behind it.

San Miguel teaches you to slow down. It teaches you that the tenth frame is often better than the first, that colour is seductive but not always necessary and that the narrow, less-travelled streets often yield richer work than the postcard views. Most importantly, it teaches you that five days is just enough time to begin understanding a place and just enough time to want to return.

RICK HALPERN

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WINGED FAIRIES

Catherine Régnier

There are places where time seems to stand still, where land and water merge in a verdant embrace. In the wetlands, winding rivers, murmuring streams and still ponds glisten in the spring sunshine. For the curious walker, these places are havens of coolness; for the nature photographer, they are the stage for an age-old ballet.

For here, in this atmosphere of serenity that bathes the water's edge, reigns the great family of damselflies, mayflies and dragonflies.

Dragonflies and mayflies are among the oldest flying insects, having existed for around 300 million years. Some fossilised dragonfly species had a wingspan of up to 70cm,, far larger than those of today, bearing witness to their long evolutionary history.

The term 'dragonflies' is generally used to refer to the order Odonata, which actually comprises two suborders: damselflies (Zygoptera) and dragonflies in the strict sense, which are the Anisoptera. Mayflies are often confused with dragonflies but belong to a different order of insects: Ephemeroptera.

Dragonflies, damselflies and mayflies fascinate us with their mastery of the elements: they spend the first part of their lives underwater before transforming into fairies of the air. Indeed, once they have reached their maximum size, the larvae emerge from the water by climbing up the stem of an aquatic plant. They then stop, attach themselves firmly to the plant and the metamorphosis begins: the larva transforms into a winged adult which, once dry, will take flight. Left on the plant stem is the larva's old 'shed skin', known as an 'exuvia'. It is always a joy to witness this emergence into a new life. Then comes the mating season, when the awestruck photographer can admire a ballet of winged fairies who will then lay their eggs in the water.

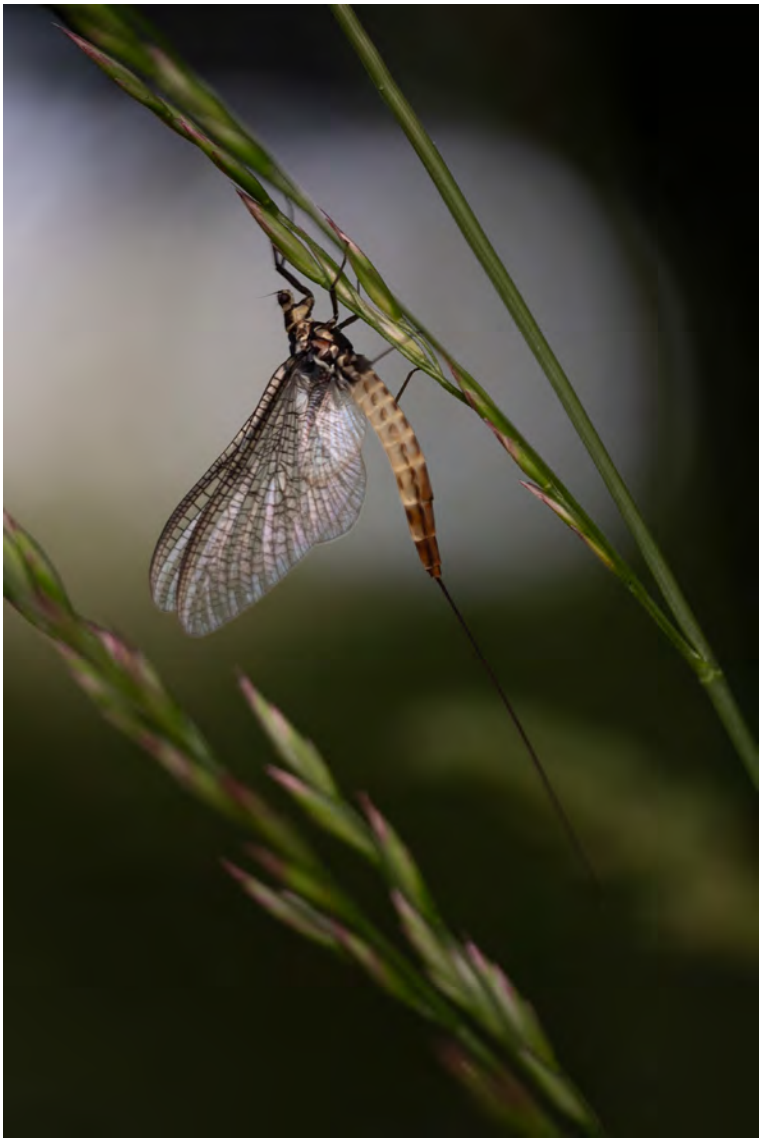
Photographing the winged fairies of ponds and rivers is much more than simply capturing moments of pure magic. It is an act of raising awareness. By learning to observe them, we realise how fragile they are. They are the sentinels of our wetlands. A wide variety of dragonflies and mayflies at a site is a sign of healthy water and a balanced ecosystem.

So, I invite you on a journey between macro and close-up photography amidst these winged fairies.

ELEGANCE

Mayflies (Ephemeroptera) owe their name to the short lifespan of their adult stage, which may last no more than a few hours. In this photograph, an adult male mayfly is undergoing its final moult.

X-T30 + XF80mmF2.8 at f/6.4, 1/500 sec, ISO 320



EPHEMERAL FAIRY

Meeting at dawn by the river. A female mayfly at rest before her nuptial flight at the end of the day.

X-T5 + XF80mmF2.8 at f/2.8, 1/250 sec, ISO 125

EPHEMERAL TRIO

As the sun begins to set, mayflies mate whilst in flight. I was lucky enough to photograph this trio of mayflies that had fallen to the ground due to the extra weight caused by the presence of a rival male. Here, the rival male persisted in trying to oust the breeding male but did not win the female, who will cast off both of them after copulation.

X-T5 + XF80mmF2.8 at f/2.8, 1/125 sec, ISO 125

DEW FAIRY

A play on light with this backlit shot that outlines the silhouette of this tiny Ephemeroptera. Beaded with dew, she dries her wings in the rising sun before taking to the skies again. In fact, mayflies are one of the insects whose population has declined sharply in France. Unlike butterflies, dragonflies and bees, the extinction of many species of mayfly is little known and insufficiently taken into account. Until about fifty years ago, they were found everywhere in swarms of millions of individuals near freshwater. In the early 2020s, a fifth of the 142 species of mayfly in France are threatened, including five that are critically endangered.

X-T5 + XF80mmF2.8 at f/5, 1/250 sec, ISO 125

HIDDEN FAIRY

A spring sun rises over this damselfly, who hid behind a blade of grass when she sensed my presence. The curious little thing was watching me with her big blue eyes!

X-T5 + XF80mmF2.8 at f/2.8, 1/125 sec, ISO 125

DISCUSSION BETWEEN DAMSELFLIES

As the sun was setting, I spotted these two damselflies facing each other. When night falls, these damselflies gather on shared or nearby perches and hide behind them, their slender bodies blending into the shadows when they sense a presence.

X-T5 + XF80mmF2.8 at f/2.8, 1/2000 sec, ISO 125

BLUE FAIRY

That morning, I experienced a moment of pure magic! I was photographing a few beads of dew as the sun came out. Then I heard the soft sound of a fairy's wings and a damselfly landed right in front of me, giving me an unforgettable moment of emotion in the golden splendour of the dawn!

X-T5 + XF80mmF2.8 at f/4.5, 1/125 sec, ISO 125

IT'S LAYING TIME!

One July evening, I had the chance to witness this magnificent spectacle of damselflies busily laying their eggs in the ponds of my village.

X-T5 + XF80mmF2.8 at f/4, 1/1000 sec, ISO 125

CALOPTERYX SPLENDENS

A particularly beautiful species of damselfly, with its deep blue and metallic colours that shimmer in the sunlight.

X-T5 + XF80mmF2.8 at f/5, 1/250 sec, ISO 125

LIGHT ON...

The microcosm of ponds is an infinite source of delight. As the sun rises, a spot of light catches my eye, illuminating the wings of a lestes, resting on a common hogweed. Lestes (Lestidae) belong to the "damselflies". This large agrion is conspicuous by its metallic green colour. Its English name is "willow spreadwing" because of its unique mode of reproduction. The female lays her eggs in the bark of branches overhanging the water. The wood species sought are rather soft: willow, ash, alder and poplar. The eggs hibernate, while the larvae hatch in spring and fall into the water, and the imago appears after three months. This is a common species in France, found near stagnant or slow-moving water, but with trees nearby.

X-T5 + XF80mmF2.8 at f/2.8, 1/250 sec, ISO 125

EMERGENCE

Whilst strolling along the banks of the ponds in my village, I came across this delicate dragonfly, fresh from shedding its exuvia, drying its wings as it was gently rocked by a playful breeze.

X-T5 + Trioplan 100mmF2.8 at f/2.8m 1/125 sec, ISO 125

DRAGONFLY FAIRY

Another newly hatched dragonfly glistening in the last rays of the sun.

X-T5 + XF80mmF2.8 at f/4, 1/250 sec, ISO 320

CATHERINE RÉGNIER

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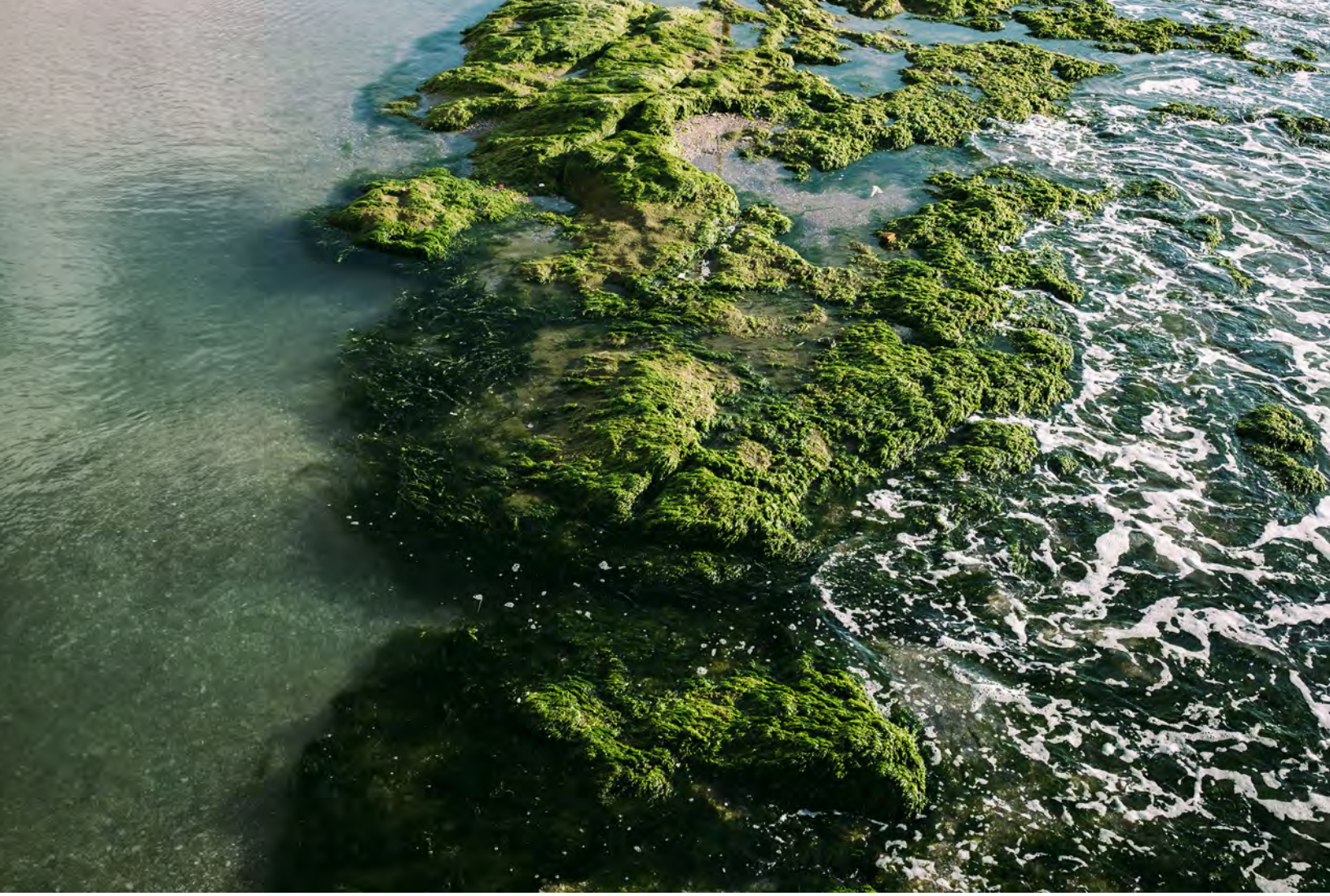
AN ODE TO MY *Favourite* LENS: THE XF23MMF1.4 R

Michael Govorko



X-T2 + XF23mmF1.4 at f/8, 1/280 sec, ISO 400

MY JOURNEY WITH FUJIFILM

My love for documenting daily life, urban landscapes and street photography is what led me to Fujifilm in the first place, and in this article, I'd like to talk about my most beloved lens: the Fujinon XF23mmF1.4 R. It's the most versatile focal length for me, with many of my favourite photographs – the images that feel most like me – being taken with this lens. This isn't a technical review; it's an ode to a lens that has shaped the way I photograph and, in many ways, the way I see the world.

I have been through quite a journey of lenses before I got this one. As a street, lifestyle and occasional portrait photographer, I started my path with the X-T2 and the XF23mmF2 WR. In the beginning, it was more than enough. As many photography masters will tell you: go out and shoot, master your camera and master your focal length. And I think that's absolutely right.

X-T2 + XF23mmF1.4 at f/1.4, 1/450 sec, ISO 400

I would definitely suggest that beginners consider a prime lens if they are looking at focal lengths between 28mm and 50mm equivalent. When you use a prime lens, you don't need to think about zooming. You can't zoom and stay calm in the same spot, scratching your belly. You need to move, think about your angles and engage with the scene. Eventually, before you even look through the viewfinder, you'll already know what the frame will look like with the focal length mounted on your camera.

X-T2 + XF23mmF1.4 at f/5.6, 1/125 sec, ISO 400

A LENS WITH CHARACTER

The XF23mmF1.4 R was released in September 2013! That's crazy... the same year the iPhone 5S was released. Thinking about that makes me realise how some parts of our daily lives, like smartphones, can become outdated and almost unusable, while this lens just keeps standing strong and proud.

This lens has character. It is not a perfect lens. It has some quirks. Sometimes it might take a moment to focus. It is not the smallest Fujinon prime lens either. But it has that something keeps pulling me back again and again. It's imperfect and that's exactly what I love about it; I don't want my images to look overly clinical. It fits perfectly with the way I like to photograph and pairs beautifully with my old friend, the X-T2.

If I spend too much time shooting with my other lenses, I feel like I'm missing something. This lens is my best companion. I always love the way my images look when they come from it. It's the lens that helps me show the world around me to my friends, family and internet audience in the way that I see it.

X-T2 + XF23mmF1.4 at f/1.4, 1/8500 sec, ISO 400

HOW I SWITCHED FROM THE XF23MMF2 WR TO THE XF23MMF1.4 R

So, why move to the older brother in the 23mm family? As I mentioned before, I started with the XF23mmF2 WR and I still think it was the right choice. At the time, I wasn't sure if photography would become a long-term hobby for me, so I simply wanted to try it out. Back during the COVID days, I had just enough budget to buy a brand-new X-T2 and XF23mmF2 combo from a local camera store. The f/2 lens is smaller, lighter and overall a very nice choice for everyday photography. So, if I have so many good things to say about the f/2 brother, how did I end up switching?

X-T2 + XF23mmF1.4 at f/8, 1/1000 sec, ISO 400

One day, I rented the XF23mmF1.4 R and went for a walk around my city. I mainly wanted to see if I would notice any difference during portrait sessions and when shooting wide open at f/1.4. And yeah... I got its vibe. I could immediately feel that I had a piece of art in my hands. It's a bit bigger and a bit heavier but nothing difficult to manage. And the rendering from this old lens was incredibly pleasing to my eye.

After that, I tried going back to my f/2 lens and it just didn't feel right anymore. I wasn't connecting with it. For me, it lacked soul. It felt too clinical. And, at f/2, it sometimes wasn't quite as sharp as I wanted it to be. So, eventually, a few years ago, I bought a mint-condition XF23mmF1.4 R on the secondhand market and sold my f/2.

X-T2 + XF23mmF1.4 at f/4, 1/500 sec, ISO 200

LET'S GET HONEST: WHAT I DON'T LOVE ABOUT IT

As I've already mentioned, the XF23mmF1.4 R is not a perfect lens. Here are a few things that I don't love about it:

- **The aperture ring isn't great.** It's simply not the best aperture ring Fujifilm has ever made. It's easy to accidentally set it to a different aperture, so you need to pay attention from time to time.
- **It's a bit bulky.** Yes, it's definitely on the heavier side compared to some of Fujifilm's compact primes. There are definitely smaller options available, such as the XF23mmF2.8 WR, XF23mmF2 WR, XF27mmF2.8 WR or XF18mmF2. I currently own the XF23mmF2.8 WR and the XF18mmF2 as well, and when I want a really lightweight setup that can just live in my bag "just in case", I'll often choose one of those lenses.
- **It has no weather resistance.** For some photographers, this may be a deal breaker. For me, it's not a huge issue. I rarely shoot in heavy rain, so I can live without it.

X-T2 + XF23mmF1.4 at f/5.6, 1/500 sec, ISO 800

X-T2 + XF23mmF1.4 at f/8, 1/250 sec, ISO 2000

WHY THE XF23MMF1.4 R HAS WON ME OVER

Despite its shortcomings, I truly love this lens. If I'm in a bad mood and want to go for a walk and photograph random moments on the street, this is probably the lens I'll take with me. It just feels right. I know exactly what to expect from it and what kind of images I'll bring home. Maybe it's not as famous among Fujifilm shooters as the legendary XF35mmF1.4 R, but for me, it's the best one.

I used to own the XF35mmF1.4 R as well, actually. It has beautiful bokeh and I created some images that I'm really proud of with it, but the equivalent 50mm field of view simply isn't for me. It feels too tight. I constantly found myself taking a few steps backwards to fit everything I wanted into the frame. For street photography, it felt too zoomed in for my taste. After barely using it for almost a year, I decided to sell it so that someone else could enjoy it properly.

X-T2 + XF23mmF1.4 at f/8, 1/900 sec, ISO 400

So yes, the XF23mmF1.4 R is a beast for me. Even after all these years, it remains the lens that best matches the way I see the world. I know Fujifilm released the XF23mmF2.8 last year, but personally, I don't find it as appealing. It's a nice, compact lens, but I don't feel the same character from it and the f/2.8 aperture feels a bit limiting. It's a great lens for city walks, but as I mentioned earlier, after some time I always feel the need to return to the XF23mmF1.4 R. That f/1.4 aperture helps me isolate details, emphasise the things I want viewers to notice, and create images with depth and mood. The bokeh from this lens is amazing. It feels slightly vintage and I'm totally vibing with it. It offers a perspective that feels natural to me: wide enough to tell a story, yet intimate enough to keep the viewer connected to the subject.

MICHAEL GOVORKO

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FUJILOVE COMMUNITY
FROM THE FEED

Welcome to our community feature for FujiLove Magazine! Each month, we're taking you behind the lens of some of the most popular photographs shared on our Instagram feed taken by members of the FujiLove community using #fujilove.

This image came from a winter hike through Parc naturel régional de Portneuf in Saint-Alban, where I set out to explore the ice walls. I was using my usual setup, an X-T4 paired with the XF16-80mmF4, reliable for both landscapes and spontaneous moments. The drive took about an hour, followed by a 10km hike to reach the main area. As the afternoon came to an end, we came across a group of climbers.

What immediately caught my attention was the contrast between their colourful jackets and the surrounding snow. It created an atmosphere that brought together the energy of the climbers and the environment they were interacting with, shaping a scene that felt both vibrant and adventurous. For me, the image reflects that intersection where human passion meets beautiful landscape.

X-T4 + XF16-80mmF at f/5.6, 1/1000 sec, ISO 640

Eliot Burns

@eliotbw

My name is Silvia, known in the photography world as Silly Photography.

I am a passionate photographer from Hamburg, wandering the streets of different cities with my X100VI, always in search of authentic moments and the small stories of everyday life.

In March 2026, I travelled to Tokyo to pursue street photography. As always, I used the Acros-R film simulation mode on my camera and shot in both JPEG and RAW.

This photo was taken at the Tokyo International Forum, a location I had already marked on my list before the trip for its potential for minimalist light-and-shadow photography.

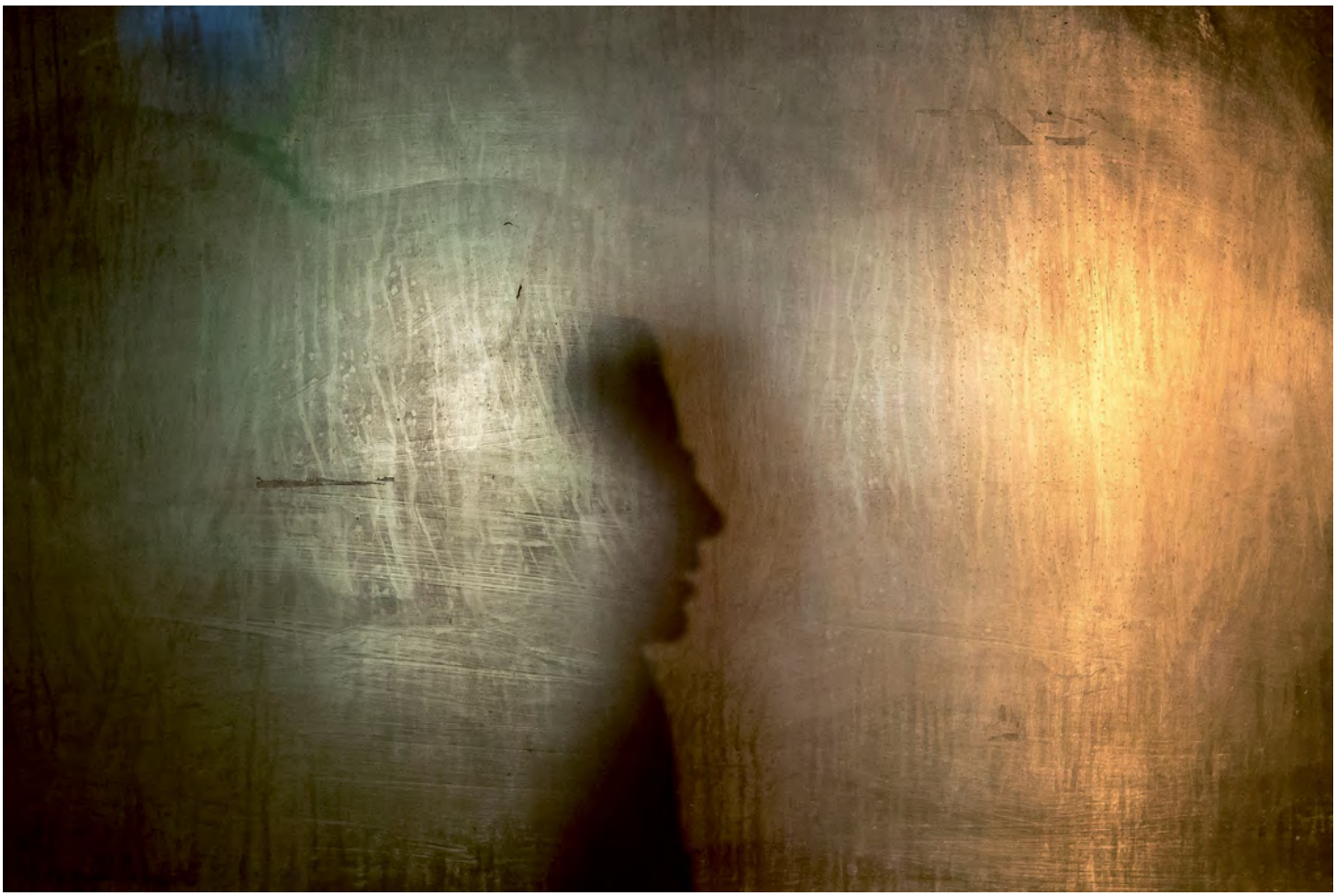
I deliberately chose a sunny day to capture the building's striking shadows and found an elevated vantage point to photograph the graphic interplay of light and shadow from above. Then I waited patiently for the right moment until, finally, an interesting passerby with a briefcase walked through the beam of light.

For this shot, I used the 70mm digital zoom on my X100VI – the only time I did so during the entire trip. What I particularly love about this image is the interplay of strong contrasts and the clean silhouette of the man with his briefcase.

X100VI at f/3.6, 1/500 sec, ISO 125

Silvia Grimpe

@sillyphotography_street



X-T1 + XF56mmF1.2 at f/1.2, 1/250 sec, ISO 2500
Matt Hall
@the13thsecond

This image was captured in Cambridge back in 2018. It was taken at an old bus stop behind a shopping centre with a road and footpath running behind it, which, during the day, was nothing to look at but at night came alive with light and texture.

I had initially spotted shadows of people being projected onto the back of it and knew it would give an interesting shot. Because of the ever-changing lights of the passing traffic and the different types of people, the scene offered a lot of opportunities. This, coupled with the different textures on the glass itself, meant that I found myself visiting the spot regularly and producing a series of images from it. Sometimes I would get the red of brake lights cutting through or the blue of a passing ambulance. All of this would be constantly changing and evolving in front of me, and the only thing I could control was the timing of the shutter to capture the human element.

After a handful of visits, I realised that the best time to shoot it was following rush hour, when the traffic was moving and the footfall was still good. Any earlier and the traffic was stationary and any later and nobody would walk past. None of the light sources were particulary strong and my camera settings reflect this, shooting wide open at f/1.2 and an ISO that was higher than I would usually go. I try not to exceed 1600, but because I needed to catch quite quick movement, my shutter had to be 1/250s at least.

Although it's not my personal favourite of this particular series, this shot has proven to be very popular with other people. I really like the colour combinations here, the depth of texture and also the emergence of the subject from the scene.

For years, I have wandered the shores of the Northern Adriatic, a landscape where the boundary between sea and sky often dissolves into a seamless, melancholic nothingness. Within these spaces, I have shaped Alfabeto (Alphabet), an ongoing series that seeks not to document a territory but to translate a deeply personal inner experience into a visual language. Inspired by the "everyday vision" of Luigi Ghirri, I look upon these deserted beaches not as geographical coordinates but as mirrors for the self. The winter season is essential to this search; during these hazy months, the coast sheds its summer skin to reveal a skeletal, minimalist essence.

This frame, captured in Caorle, not far from Venice, embodies that emotional mapping. The landscape is reduced to its primary elements: the sweeping, sculptural curve of a yellow slide in the foreground and the rhythmic, silent geometry of the beach huts in the distance. It is an alphabet of forms – a grammar composed of empty spaces and eloquent absences.

Captured with the X-Pro1 and the XF 35mmF1.4 R, this image is the result of a ritualistic slowness and remains one of my favourites to date. The 35mm is truly the poet's choice; it eschews clinical sharpness in favour of a soulful character, rendering the soft pastel gradient of the Adriatic dusk with a painterly texture. In this suspended quietude, these simple shapes become profound reflections of the soul.

X-Pro1 + XF35mmF1.4 at f/5.6, 1/450 sec, ISO 800

Michele Tardivo

@michele.tardivo

FUJILOVE
INTERVIEW

Jess Ellis

In this month's interview, Stephanie Baxter is chatting with Jess Ellis, a travel photographer, writer and creative living in London. From considered restaurants to soulful hotels and everyday moments, she creates destination stories that aim to capture the feeling of that moment in time.

X-S20 + XF16-55mmF2.8 at f/8, 1/40 sec, ISO 800

Jess, welcome to FujiLove! Can you tell us a little bit about who you are and what you do?

Thanks for having me! I'm a travel photographer and creator living in London. You'll find me online at @jesslouiseellis, sharing scenes from life here as well as my trips around the UK and abroad.

I try to focus on painting a full picture of visiting a destination, from design-led hotels to tiny local restaurants or the less-explored neighbourhoods. All of this influences my photography and what I capture. I mainly share my photos on Instagram and my more in-depth travel guides on my Substack newsletter, Sonder Editions.

X-S20 + XF16-55mmF2.8 at f/8, 1/220 sec, ISO 640

How did you first get started with photography, and how have you developed your skills to where they are now?

Like lots of us, my first exposure to making images was a high school photography class. After this, I didn't touch a camera for 10 years. I blame phones...!

When I moved to London from New Zealand, I started sharing the things I love online: people, places and food from my travels across England and beyond. Over time, I became really tired of using my phone to capture it all, and my one rule has always been to not let the action of "capturing" get in the way of the actual experience. So, a few years back, I picked up the X-T30 II as a way to be more connected with the image-making process. I've never really been a techy person, so it was a steep and sharp learning curve to get back into using a camera.

X-T30 II + XF35mmF2 at f/5.6, 1/900 sec, ISO 320

Since then, my improvement, as with anything creative, has been through getting the hours in. No number of YouTube videos will teach you to be a photographer (although they are very helpful). For me, it's about learning by doing and honing your taste that way. The more reps you get in, the more you learn what you do like and what you don't, and where you need to push yourself to improve your image-making.

Even a few years into this, I still feel like I'm at the very start of my journey. For a long time, I called myself a creator, and I've only recently started calling myself a photographer. I'm much closer to making things I love now, but I also know how much I have left to improve on. And most of it has nothing to do with the camera or the gear. It's about getting out there, and working with different situations, light, restrictions and techniques to really hone your approach.

What is your approach to photography while travelling?

It's very much an on-the-go approach. I will rarely wake up early or seek out specific locations. I like to capture what I see, experience and feel, and right now I don't want my trips to only be in pursuit of the image. However, I will actively carve out spaces in my itinerary to just be in an environment and enjoy time observing, not rushing. That might mean staying overnight in smaller towns to enjoy them before any tours arrive or actively choosing more off-the-beaten-path sites to visit.

I've recently realised that every major tourist site I've visited over the past year has left me feeling incredibly dissatisfied as a photographer. That one image you're supposed to get is almost always an awful experience to try and capture and, really, it just looks like everybody else's image. So, I've stopped really trying to capture that "perfect" image. I care more about what's happening a few steps down, on the balcony above or a couple of streets over.

With my collections of images, I hope to paint a picture of what it was like to be there, whether that's a bustling morning market in France, a rainy day in the British countryside or rush hour in Tokyo.

X-S20 + XF18-55mmF2.8-4 at f/5.6, 1/120 sec, ISO 320

X-S20 + XF16-55mmF2.8 at f/2.8, 1/300 sec, ISO 640

X-S20 + XF16-55mmF2.8 at f/2.8, 1/340 sec, ISO 640

What has been your favourite place to shoot in and why?

I'm really drawn to places with texture, patina and a more lived-in atmosphere. It's why a historic onsen town in Japan, the souks of Marrakech and a stone village on the outskirts of the Lake District give me the same sense of excitement.

I finally ticked off my dream trip to Japan last autumn and my favourite collection of images is from a place called Shibu Onsen. It's a very small, weathered town that only hosts a handful of guests each night due to the limited number of ryokans. So while we were in Japan in peak autumn, saw Kyoto covered in fiery foliage and visited one of the most renowned temples in the country, it's this small onsen town in the midst of Nagano's countryside that will always have my heart.

X-S20 + XF16-55mmF2.8 at f/5.6, 1/25 sec, ISO 800

X-S20 + XF18-55mmF2.8-4 at f/4, 1/340 sec, ISO 320

Your photos have such a beautiful, film-like feel to them. What's your approach to shooting and editing to get that look?

Thank you. I'm a creature of habit, so I've been using ASTIA with some recipe tweaks since I started for JPEGs. If the lighting is in my favour, I'll often use these straight out of the camera with some exposure tweaks. But often I want to create a certain feeling, so I will tweak the colours, blacks and clarity in Lightroom. I love to emphasise any bursts of light, so I'll also usually go in with masking to play this up. I've only started editing my images in the past year, and it's crazy how much it changes your view and the potential of what you capture, as well as helping to create a consistent feeling for your work.

What has your experience shooting with Fujifilm gear been like?

As I mentioned, I'm not really a techy person, and I hate the thought of lugging around a bunch of gear. I started with the X-T30 II and the XF18-55mmF2.8-4 as it was pretty easy to use out of the box but had enough room to grow as I learnt more about how the camera worked. I've learnt I really like the flexibility of a zoom when I'm on the go and the ease of using a lighter camera body. I actually get a lot of compliments on the silver X-T30, so I think it's a less intimidating model to take out and about.

After a year, I picked up the X-S20 as my main body and now exclusively use this for travel photography and big trips. I've almost always got the XF16-55mmF2.8 II lens glued to it – it's just so beautiful, versatile and lightweight. I still love my X-T30 as an everyday carry or for personal trips and will usually pair this with the XF35mmF2 or the XF23mmF2. Sometimes it's just nice to have the limitation of a fixed lens and switch your brain off from trying to "capture it all".

X-S20 + XF16-55mmF2.8 at f/2.8, 1/950 sec, ISO 640

What would be your advice to someone looking to build an audience around their photography online?

Try to build your audience around a subject of interest, not just your images. For me, that's travel and food, and photography is one method of communicating the story. So, if you're a landscape photographer, build around hiking, your methods and being outdoors. If you're a portrait photographer, build around the people you meet and the stories you tell. If you're a food photographer, build around local producers, seasonal ingredients or sourcing unique crockery. It's a lot of extra work, but it also gives you so much more freedom to create what you want and develop your style and projects on your own terms.

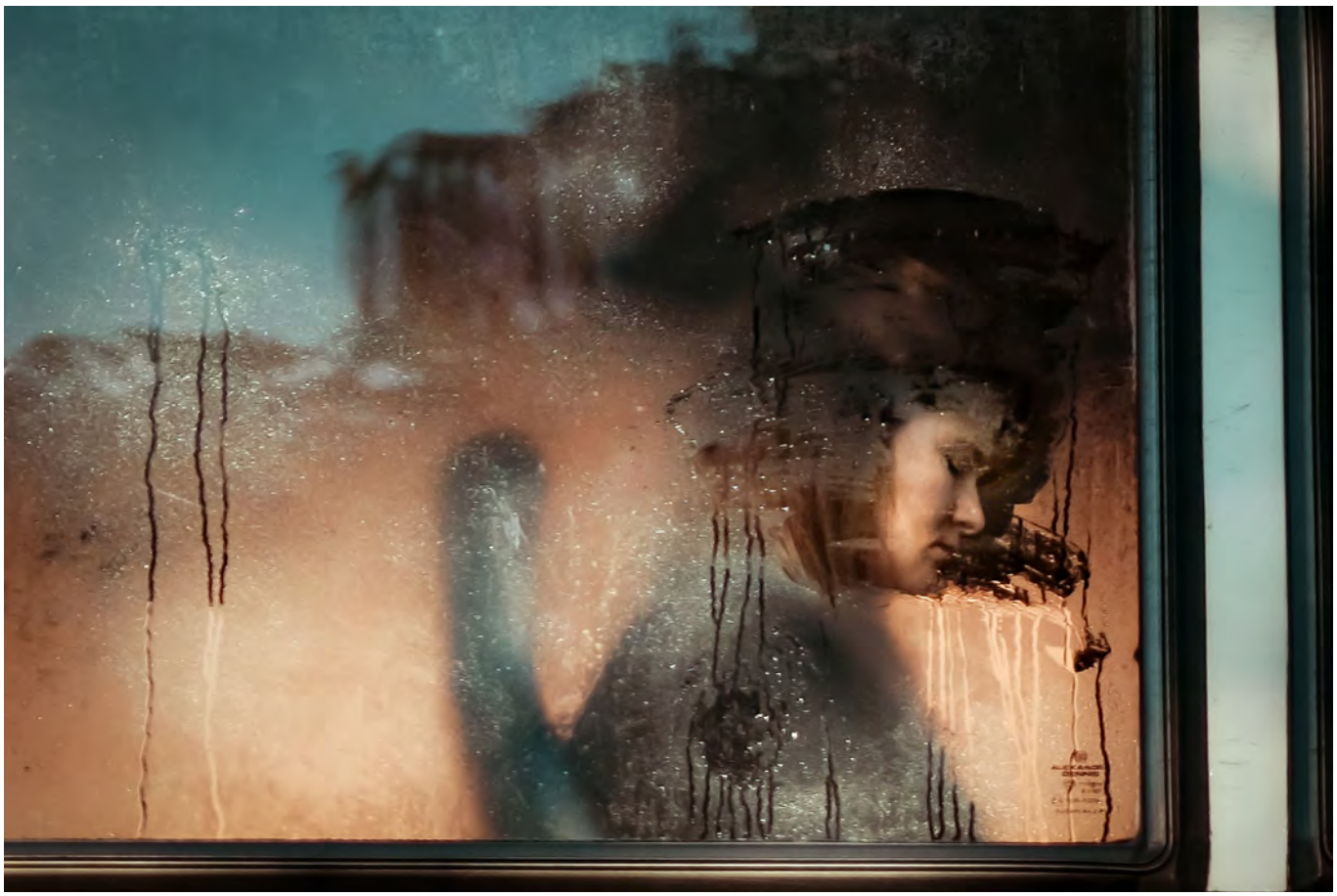
X-S20 + XF16-55mmF2.8 at f/8, 1/170 sec, ISO 640

JESS ELLIS

www.instagram.com/jesslouiseellis

EXETER, UK: PHOTOGRAPHY CLOSE TO HOME

In an era when we increasingly ask whether an image is accurate or manipulated, candid street portraiture offers something different: real people in unscripted moments. This authenticity is one reason audiences continue to connect with the genre. Capturing a compelling portrait without directing the subject requires observation, timing, composition and the ability to anticipate moments. Dawn Eagleton has solidified her reputation as one of the most successful contemporary photographers within this sub-genre of street photography. In this six-part series, Dawn retraces her journey from the beginning, exploring the cities where she honed her craft in search of the perfect unposed portrait of a stranger.



FINDING ART IN THE EVERYDAY

X-T1 + XF56mmF1.2 at f/2, 1/2000 sec, ISO 200

For the past nine years, I have visited several cities across the world with my Fujifilm cameras to photograph strangers in candid, unposed moments. I'm always searching for authentic, human portraits and the small moments that make each place feel intimate and relatable. Strong candid portraits can reveal personality, emotion and social context in ways that posed portraits sometimes cannot. A glance, gesture, interaction or the placement of natural light from the sun can transform an ordinary scene into a compelling portrait, and I'm always looking for that extra special element that turns a good candid street portrait into a great one.

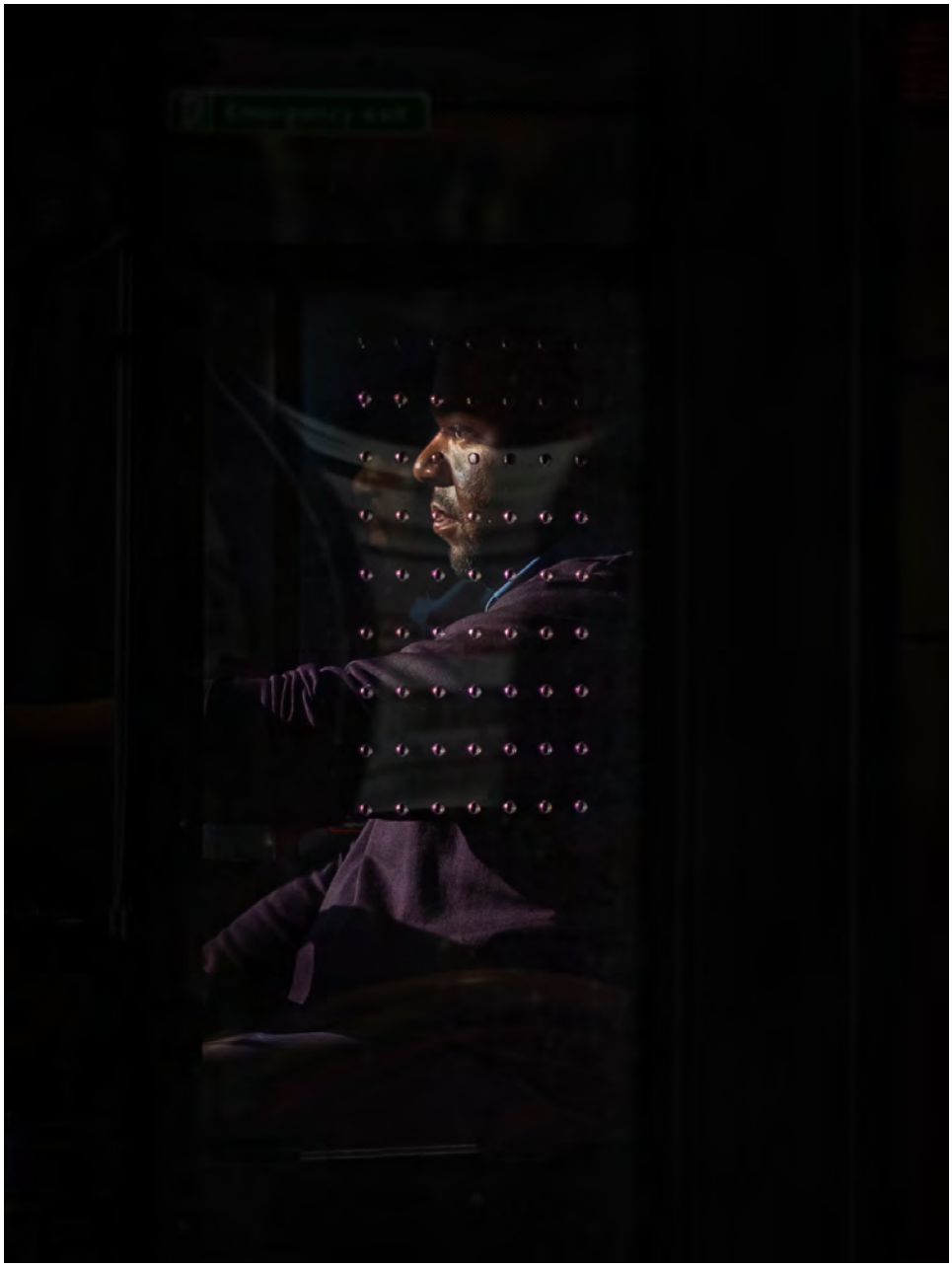
For my first article, I want to return to the beginning, to explore where the foundations of my practice were formed, and to reflect on how my work was shaped by the place I called home for ten years: Exeter in Devon, UK.

Exeter is a relatively small historic city in South West England, far less populated and much more relaxed in pace than some of the larger cities in the UK, such as London or Manchester. It was here that I learned the fundamental skills required to become a good candid portrait artist: how to observe, approach and anticipate people in a way that ensures I don't disturb their natural stance or expression, allowing me to capture the most authentic portrait possible from each moment.

A LIFETIME OF STORIES
X-T4 + XF35mmF1.4 at f/2, 1/640 sec, ISO 160

ADVENTURE AWAITS

X-T1 + XF56mmF1.2 at f/2, 1/1000 sec, ISO 200



CONFESSIONS OF A BUS DRIVER

X-T1 + 56mmF1.2 at f/2, 1/2000 sec, ISO 2000

I moved from Essex to Devon in 2015 and a year later, I bought my first camera: the Fujifilm X-T1. Although I was surrounded by some of the UK's most beautiful landscapes, I found myself far more interested in photographing people. I studied Film and Communication at university, so I have always been fascinated by the visuals of film but, equally, human behaviour and interaction. For the first couple of years, I didn't really do much with the camera beyond learning the basics, while I worked through what I felt genuinely interested in and passionate about.

Then, in 2018, while on a family holiday in Valencia, I took my first candid street portrait. I'd noticed a man in a supermarket whose face seemed to carry a lifetime of stories and I felt compelled to make a portrait of him. Luckily, I had my camera in my hand from taking photographs of my daughter around the city. As the gentleman stepped outside, I instinctively followed him, and as he paused at a roadside crossing, I quickly raised my camera and clicked the shutter. Later, when I looked at the image, I realised I had captured him exactly as I'd seen him – unguarded and authentic – and the image sparked a curiosity about who he was and the life story etched into his face. That photograph marked a significant moment for me and ignited my fascination with candid street portraiture.

SMALL GESTURES

X-T1 + XF56mmF1.2 at f/2, 1/4000 sec, ISO 200

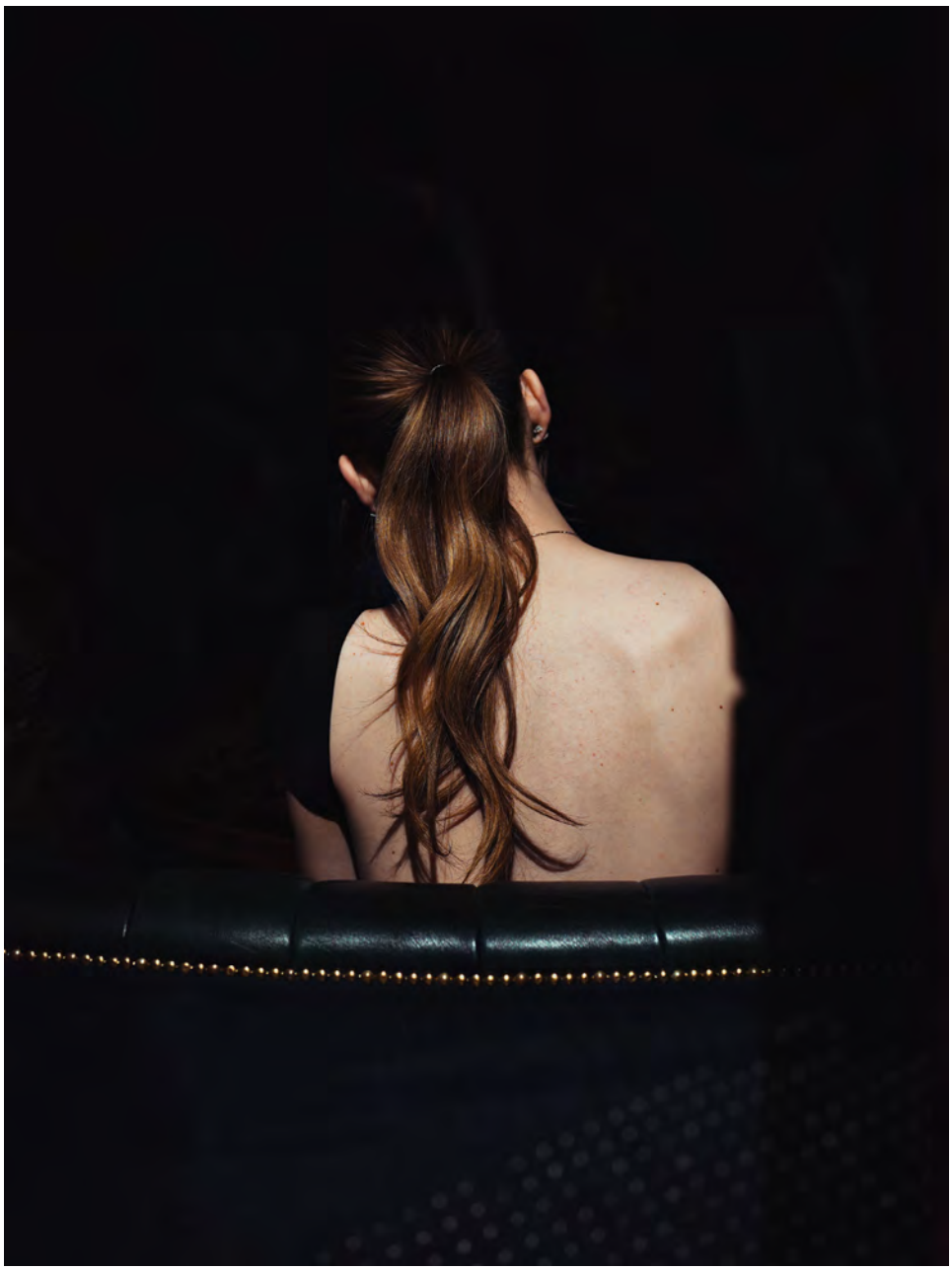
I now had a clear direction and focus for my photography, and I began putting it into practice by creating more candid portraits when I returned home to Devon. I would visit Exeter city centre as often as I could with my camera, walking up and down the high street to see who and what I could find. I was aiming to recreate the authenticity of the photograph I made in Valencia, so I gravitated toward people caught in quiet, reflective moments, often found sitting alone in cafés or staring out from buses and trains. I wasn't drawn to larger-than-life characters with flamboyant outfits, but rather, I enjoyed creating interesting images from everyday people – a true reflection of us in the here and now. I wanted the viewer of my photographs to feel that they could relate in some way to the subject by recognising shared expressions, mannerisms and experiences.

LOST WITHOUT YOU
X-T1 + XF56mmF1.2 at f/2, 1/1000 sec, ISO 200

I realised after a short amount of time that because of the way in which I was looking for my subjects, I was fortuitously collecting a cohesive body of images where many of them had the same thing in common: they were taken through windows. During this process, I also discovered how wonderful glass is as a tool in street photography, and I began experimenting and playing with texture, light, framing and layers. Some of my most successful images to date were made in those first few years of exploration.

THIS GROWING PRESSURE

X-T1 + XF56mmF1.2 at f/2, 1/1000 sec, ISO 200



BACK TO BLACK
X-T4 + XF35mmF1.4 at f/2, 1/1000 sec, ISO 200

Of course, not every visit to the city was fruitful. Anyone who has spent time doing street photography knows that some days yield nothing at all, while on other days the magic ingredients somehow come together, rewarding you with one or two images that make the entire effort worthwhile. But consistency is key and with each step, I learnt something new about technique and sharpened my skills. During this time, I would see images online from much larger cities and feel a little envious that they had a seemingly more colourful, busy and diverse canvas to play with. But rather than feel defeated by it, I treated it as a test of my eye, searching for images in my smaller, quieter city that captured the same energy and intrigue I had always admired in larger cities.

GOD'S WAITING ROOM

X-T1 + XF56mmF1.2 at f/2, 1/500 sec, ISO 200

START SPREADING THE NEWS
X-T1 + XF56mmF1.2 at f/2, 1/1000 sec, ISO 200

The truth is that in some ways, I had an advantage; the slower pace and less busy environment gave me the time and space I needed to work it out, and the laid-back nature of the people gave me the courage I required to be able to approach them with my camera. It pushed me to look more carefully, to become more present and to find meaning in the subtle details that might otherwise go unnoticed. Eventually, the perseverance of walking up and down that high street paid off. I felt I had acquired a good skill set, both in terms of my ability to photograph technically but also to approach strangers and effectively capture their portrait without disturbing them too much. By 2025, I had enough images, both from Exeter and subsequent travels, to put into my debut book *Through the Glass* – a work that spans seven to eight years and features all my favourite images taken through windows.

THE BEGINNING OF THE JOURNEY

X-T1 + XF56mmF1.2 at f/1.4, 1/60 sec, ISO 1600

HILDA

X-T1 + XF56mmF1.2 at f/2, 1/250 sec, ISO 200

Exeter had a significant impact on me, and I'll always be grateful to the people and places there. It's very fitting that the shop where I bought my first camera was on that very high street where I learnt so much about my practice. The city gave me the building blocks and confidence to navigate busier urban environments such as New York and London with greater ease. I was able to home in on the smaller details and quieter moments without allowing the noise and distractions to overwhelm me. I will be writing about some of those places in the coming months.

I have since gone on to work for Fujifilm UK on several projects and, in 2025, was part of the campaign for the X-E5, the camera that I am now using to continue to pursue my love of candid portraiture.

In 2025, I said goodbye to Devon and moved to Ibiza, a new landscape to explore and discover. I am already realising that it also comes with its challenges, but I think if this early experience taught me anything, it is to not overlook the places we live as a source of inspiration, and that the everyday spaces and people around you can become powerful subjects and lead to compelling images. I think it is easy to convince ourselves that we need to travel to far-flung places to find interesting people or captivating subjects, but I believe there's always something fascinating right on our doorstep.

'Through the Glass' is available to buy from my website or from the Fujifilm House of Photography in Covent Garden, London.

Through the Glass

FUJILOVE

GEAR TALK

LET'S DIVE INTO SETTINGS AND MENUS, LEARN OUR FUJIFILM CAMERAS AND LENSES, AND RAMP UP OUR TECHNICAL SKILLS.

JULY 2026

EXPOSING RIGHT: PART 30

Correctly exposing your images is a recipe for optimal image quality, and it will help you make the most out of your camera. In this series, we take a comprehensive look at features, tools, functions and methods that can assist you on the way.

This month, we'll look at concrete exposure strategies for the built-in HDR function, from carefree handheld HDR shooting to a methodical manual-mode workflow.

EXPOSURE STRATEGIES FOR HDR MODE

The built-in HDR function can be approached at three different levels of involvement, and the right one depends on how much control the scene demands and how much time it allows. Strategy 1 hands the decision to the camera for a quick, carefree result. Strategy 2 keeps you in charge of the highlights while still shooting on the spot – the compromise between speed and precision. Strategy 3 is the methodical route: measure the exposure first in a regular camera mode, then engage HDR for the most precise and repeatable results. We will walk through all three in turn, from the most relaxed to the most deliberate.

STRATEGY 1: JUST HAVE FUN WITH HDR

The most relaxed way to use the built-in HDR function is to set the drive mode to HDR AUTO and let the camera decide. HDR AUTO works in concert with any exposure mode (program, aperture priority, shutter priority or manual) and you can leave ISO on AUTO if you like.

Based on the contrast range it reads from the scene, the camera then picks HDR200, HDR400 or HDR800 on its own. The trade-off is that you give up precise control over the highlights; the live view and the live histogram always show you an HDR200 (i.e. DR200%) preview, regardless of which setting the camera ultimately selects, so you cannot reliably expose for the brightest highlights the way we do elsewhere in this series.

Instead, simply expose for the midtones and your main subject and aim for an image that looks pleasing on the screen. This is HDR as a point-and-shoot convenience – quick, forgiving and good enough whenever you don't have the time, or the inclination, to measure a scene properly.

STRATEGY 2: GET IT RIGHT, FAST

Strategy 2 is the compromise between the speed of Strategy 1 and the precision of Strategy 3: you expose for the highlights on the spot, in HDR mode, trading the methodical measure-first workflow for a single manual correction.

- Start by picking a fixed HDR setting yourself (HDR200, HDR400, HDR800 or HDR800 PLUS) and shoot away.
- The advantage over HDR AUTO is that, for the two lower settings, the live view actually tells you the truth: with HDR200 and HDR400 selected, the camera shows you a correct DR200% and DR400% rendering, respectively. As long as the live view behaves, you can expose to the highlights properly, using the live view together with the RGB histogram and the overexposure "blinkies", just as we do throughout this series.

• The two higher settings need a manual correction because their live view does not match the final capture; for HDR800 and HDR800 PLUS, add +1 EV of exposure compensation to your set exposure (three clicks towards the plus side) when you are in one of the AE modes (P, A, or S). In manual mode M, where you will want to work with a fixed ISO setting rather than AUTO ISO, you can achieve the same thing by decreasing the shutter speed by one stop (1 EV). For example, 1/250 sec. becomes 1/125 sec.

STRATEGY 3: MEASURE FIRST, HDR SECOND

The most precise and reliable way to use the built-in HDR function is to measure your exposure first in regular exposure mode and engage HDR second:

• Set the camera to manual mode M, DR100% and a regular still-image drive mode (Single Shot). Disable the Natural Live View, set the film simulation to ETERNA with HIGHLIGHT TONE and SHADOW TONE at –2, and assign the RGB histogram with "blinkies" to an Fn button. This is the same "JPEG settings for RAW shooters" setup we have used throughout this series.

• Use base ISO (for example, ISO 125 in an X-T5) if light allows; otherwise, jump to the camera's dual-conversion-gain level of ISO 500 (applies to all fifth-generation X and GFX models). Dial in the required/desired aperture for depth of field and brightest shutter speed that doesn't blow the highlights you want to keep – the "blinkies" will tell you when you have arrived.

• Now switch the drive setting to HDR, select HDR800 PLUS and slow the shutter speed by three full stops. This time, the correction is three stops rather than the single stop of Strategy 2 because here you measured your exposure in a regular, non-HDR mode; HDR800 and HDR800 PLUS record their darkest frame three stops below the indicated master, so slowing the shutter by three stops puts that darkest frame back exactly on the highlight exposure you just metered. For example, a measured exposure of 1/250 sec. at f/8 becomes 1/30 sec. at f/8, without changing the ISO setting. The camera will then bracket around that new master, capturing one additional frame as dark as your original highlight exposure and another one that's considerably brighter.

The result is a flat composite JPEG with plenty of additional dynamic range and an HDR-RAF container you can reprocess later. HDR800 PLUS is my default for this workflow because it can be downgraded to HDR800, HDR400 or HDR200 in the camera's built-in RAW converter, and the film simulation, tone curve and clarity can all be adjusted in the same pass. Capture once, decide later.

HDR AND HIGHER ISO SETTINGS

Everything we have discussed so far assumes a comfortable amount of light. As soon as the light drops and the ISO climbs, the case for the built-in HDR function weakens and at some point, it disappears altogether. This is worth understanding because the camera will happily shoot HDR at any ISO, including the high values that AUTO ISO reaches after dark, where it can no longer deliver what it promises. To see why, it helps to look at what HDR actually does to each of its three frames.

Remember that HDR captures a master frame at the metered exposure, a darker frame to protect the highlights and a brighter frame to lift the shadows, then merges them into one tone-mapped result. At higher ISO settings, the benefit lives almost entirely in the brighter shadow frame because that is where extra exposure buys you cleaner shadows. But that frame is also the one that needs the slowest shutter speed, and as the ambient light falls, the required exposure can easily stretch into the range where camera shake or subject movement blurs it. Once the shadow frame is smeared, the very part of the image that HDR was meant to improve is the part that suffers. The darker highlight frame, meanwhile, rarely earns its keep: DR400 or DR-P Strong already protect your highlights from a single exposure, so the extra dark frame adds little that you could not get more simply. That leaves the master frame and here is the crux of the matter: at a high ISO it is just as noisy as the single frame you would have captured with DR or DR-P with the same ISO setting. HDR does not lower the noise of the master; noise rises with ISO because a higher ISO means less light reached the sensor (and hence requires more ISO amplification), and no amount of bracketing changes how much light fell on that master exposure.

It is worth being clear about why DR and DR-P make a better job of this. Both are processing functions rather than exposure modes; the camera deliberately underexposes the capture to hold the highlights, then lifts the shadows and midtones afterwards, in the processor. DR400, for instance, underexposes by two ISO stops, so even though the camera shows a higher ISO to satisfy the metering system, the actual ISO amplification in the RAW data is two stops lower. The highlights are protected by that underexposure in a single, sharp frame.

The built-in HDR function cannot match this in low light; it brackets around whatever ISO is set, AUTO or otherwise, so its master frame is exposed at the high ISO the meter calls for and carries the noise to match – noise that the bright shadow frame can only fix if its long shutter speed does not blur first. So, when the light falls and the ISO has to climb, the more sensible choice is often DR400 or DR-P Strong, which hold your highlights in one exposure, rather than HDR, which asks for three frames and, at high ISO, gains nothing on the master, little on the highlights and risks blur on the shadows. The practical takeaway is simple: HDR is a daylight or tripod tool. When the ISO has to climb, reach for DR or DR-P instead.

HOW HDR EXPOSES THE THREE SHOTS

One detail is worth keeping in mind throughout all of this. Whichever way you set up the master exposure, the built-in HDR function always creates its darker and brighter frames by varying the shutter speed alone. Aperture and ISO stay exactly as they were on the master frame, so the depth of field and the ISO amplification are identical across all three captures, though the noise is not because each frame collects a different amount of light and it is light, not ISO, that determines how much noise a frame contains. Higher ISO amplification just makes the noise more visible.

Your choice of exposure mode (program, aperture priority, shutter priority or manual) only determines how the camera arrives at the master exposure; it does not change how the other two frames are derived from it. Likewise, the AUTO-ISO minimum shutter speed setting only applies to the master frame. That is also why the bright shadow frame is the one with the slowest shutter speed and why it is the first to suffer when the light is low; the camera cannot raise the ISO or open the aperture to keep the shutter speed of this frame fast because doing so would break the consistency the merge depends on.

Fig 1A

Fig 1B

Fujifilm's built-in HDR mode takes three shots at different exposure levels: one master shot at the set exposure, and two darker/brighter shots to protect highlights and reduce shadow noise. I shot this example using strategy 3 and HDR800 PLUS in manual exposure mode M.

In HDR800 and HDR800 PLUS mode, the darkest frame is recorded three stops darker than the indicated exposure level. To compensate, I manually decreased the "expose to the highlights" shutter speed three stops. Image **A** shows the resulting straight-out-of-camera HDR800 PLUS JPEG with the CLASSIC CHROME film simulation.

With the camera's built-in RAW converter, you can also save HDR composites as "16-bit" TIFF files and further process them with any software. I then used Adobe Lightroom to add a little bit more punch and shadow details to the straight-out-of-camera HDR800 PLUS CLASSIC CHROME TIFF (image **B**).

WHAT'S NEW IN ADOBE CAMERA RAW & WHY IT MATTERS FOR LIGHTROOM

If you've been following my articles here in FujiLove Magazine, you'll know I spend most of my time in Lightroom Classic. It's where my Fujifilm RAW files live, where my presets are and where my editing muscle memory is buried deep. So, why am I writing about Adobe Camera Raw today?

Camera Raw is, under the hood, the same processing engine as Lightroom. Same sliders, same masking logic, just a different wrapper. Camera Raw is always the first to receive new features before they are rolled out to the Lightroom ecosystem. Whatever lands in Camera Raw (or the beta) today tends to show up in Lightroom Classic sometime later. Although it's never guaranteed, I've never seen it not happen because both apps need to be able to communicate with each other when files are passed along from Lightroom to Photoshop or when Camera Raw edits are saved as .xmp files for Lightroom to read.

Adobe has shipped some meaningful updates in Camera Raw 18.3 (at the time of writing 18.3.2) over the past few weeks and a couple of them are things I have been hoping for for years!

DEPTH RANGE MASKING: FINALLY UNLOCKED FOR EVERY IMAGE

Depth Range masking has existed in Camera Raw and Lightroom for a while, but for most of us shooting with Fujifilm cameras, it was always greyed out. The feature previously relied on the embedded (simulated) depth data in the file, the kind generated by multi-lens smartphones shooting in portrait mode. Your X-T5, your GFX, your X100VI… none of them produces that data.

Camera Raw 18.3 changes that. Adobe now generates the depth map from the image itself using AI. Any file, RAW or JPEG, can now have a depth-based mask applied to it.

To do this, from the Masking panel, pick Range > Depth Range. Either put the eyedropper on a single point in the scene or drag a rectangle in the interface to select a range of depth values at once. Camera Raw analyses the photo and uses AI to estimate the depth in it; closer objects correspond to the left of the range selector, distant objects to the right. Dragging the handles outwards or inwards expands or narrows your selection. Adjusting the fade area on either side softens the transition between masked and unmasked regions.

You can enable "Show Depth Map" to see the AI's estimate as a greyscale view, where white equals close, black means far away and red is the actual selection.

What does this open up creatively? Depth maps are an ideal tool to direct the viewer's eye to the subject of your image, e.g. by warming or brightening the foreground while cooling or darkening the background.

Adding atmospheric haze to the far distance without touching the subject is another. Separating a midground subject from both a near foreground and a distant sky becomes possible in ways it simply wasn't before. That's the theory, at least, but it comes with a word of caution…

Depending on the image, the AI-generated depth maps can be very hard around intricate edges such as branches, leaves, flyaway hairs or other irregular outlines, and the fade adjustments are often still too abrupt. The Depth Range Mask's limitations are especially noticeable the stronger your adjustments are, and unfortunately, the new Shift Edge and Feather sliders are unavailable in the Depth Range Mask. Just like with the Lens Blur feature, though, hopefully the algorithms will improve by the time this promising feature makes it into Lightroom.

To access the depth map for any image, click on the Masking icon (**1**), choose Range (**2**) and select Depth Range from the options. It even has its own shortcut in Camera Raw: Shift-D!

Using the Eyedropper or the Depth Controls (**1**), you can select which part of the image you want to work on. In this case, I selected the background, darkened it (**2**) and made it slightly cooler. For a relatively simple image like this, the depth map works well enough.

For this scene depicting the Mud Men in Papua New Guinea, the depth map struggled more: it darkened some of the bamboo fingers (**1**), (**3**) of the main protagonist and also darkened one person's face (**2**).

I tweaked the Depth Range Mask by subtracting Object selections that I painted over the parts I did not want the Depth Range Mask to darken.

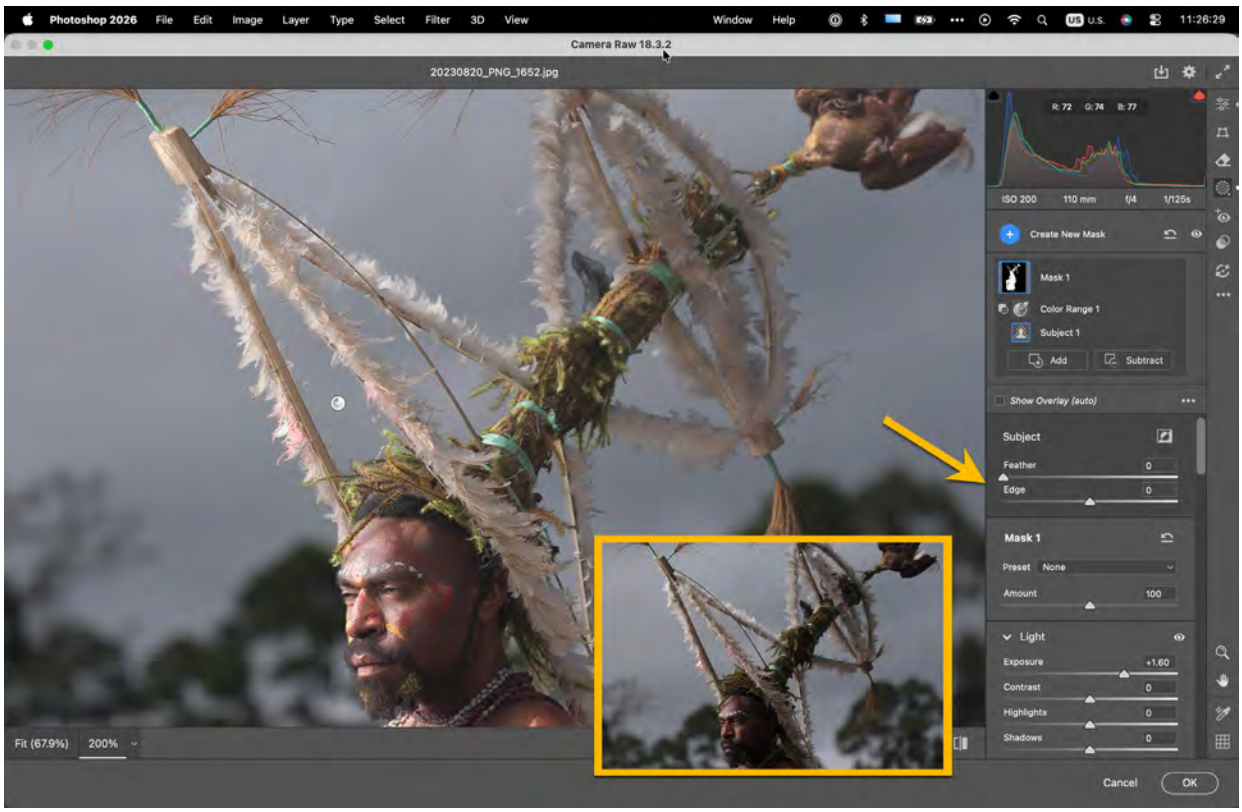
MASK EDGE REFINEMENTS: FEATHER AND SHIFT EDGE FOR MOST MASKS

This is the one many photographers, myself included, have been waiting for. Adobe's AI masking tools, like Select Sky, Select Subject, Select Background, the Landscape masks and the People masks have become very good at finding edges. In fact, they're probably amongst the best, if not the best, of any raw converter that I've tried. But sometimes, that precision is exactly the problem: they can be too precise. When you select a sky and darken the exposure considerably, add a heavy dehaze, or select someone's hair and brighten it, you can end up with a thin, bright halo. The mask is technically correct, but the image still looks processed.

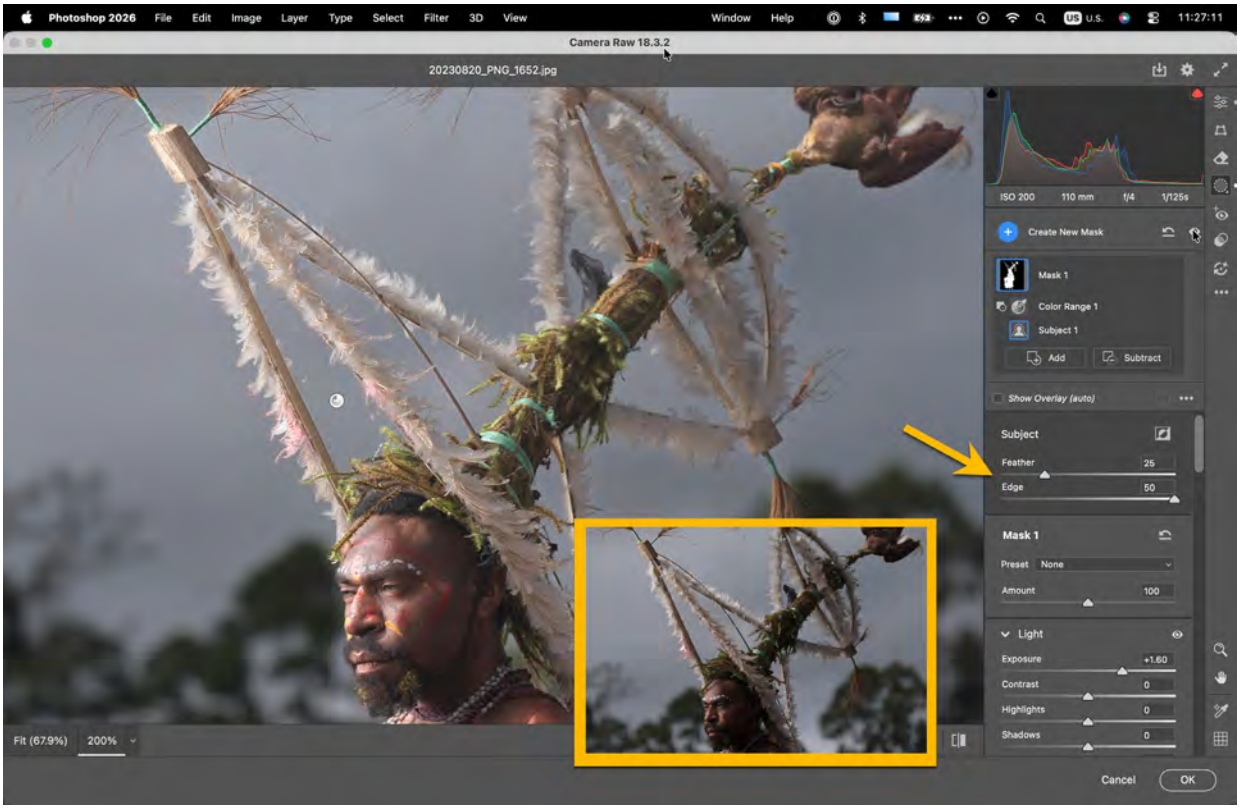
Until now, there was nothing to do about it, except for some convoluted workflows where you subtracted a feathered brush or intersected a sky mask with a linear gradient to make its effect less pronounced near the horizon line. The golden oldies – the Brush, the Radial Gradient and the Linear gradient – have always had a built-in feather control, although in the case of the Brush, you had to set it beforehand and couldn't change it afterwards. It's the reason I sometimes use Adjustment Layers in Photoshop because you can non-destructively feather the mask in the Properties panel.

Camera Raw 18.3.1 adds two sliders to the top of the masking panel that appear whenever you're working with an AI-generated mask: **Feather** and **Edge**. **Feather** softens the mask boundary by blurring it, creating a gradual transition rather than a hard cut. It's most useful when fine details like tree branches or hair create fringing after a strong adjustment. **Edge** does something different: it shifts *where* the selection edge sits. A negative value pulls the mask inward; a positive one pushes it outward, which is what you want when the AI is leaving fine detail unselected.

Often, you'll want to use these two sliders together, not separately. Feathering alone without edge adjustment can leave a ghost of the original halo. Edge adjustment alone, without feathering, simply trades one hard edge for a new one. Pull the edge in slightly, then soften the transition with Feather. To see what's happening, you can switch the mask overlay to White on Black view. The boundary becomes clearly visible, and you can watch in real time as Feather softens it and Edge shifts it.



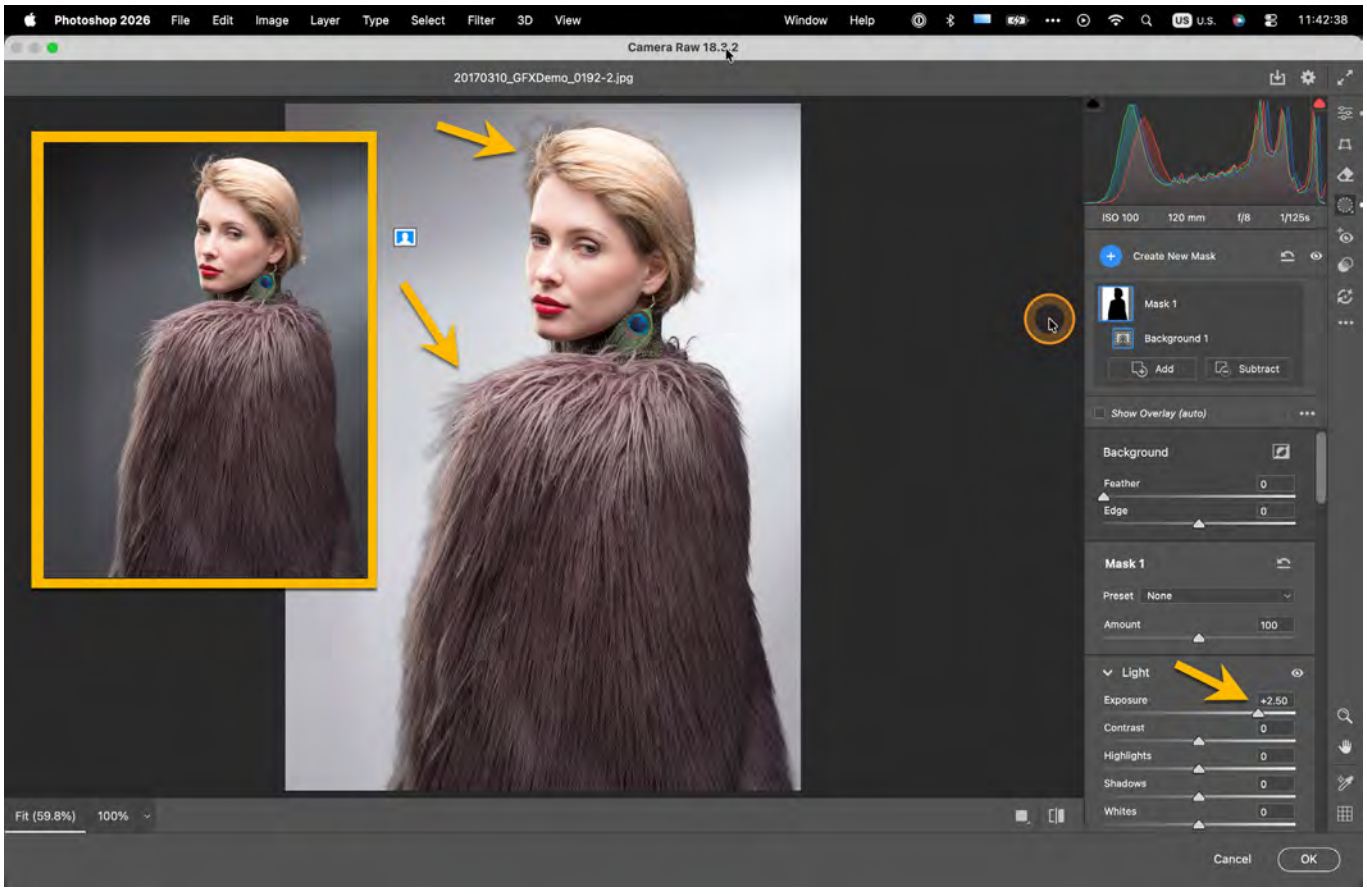
This would be a difficult selection for anyone, man or machine. I wanted to brighten the subject and his wonderful hat. The default selection selected too little of the right part of the hat. Painting this manually would be a lot of work.

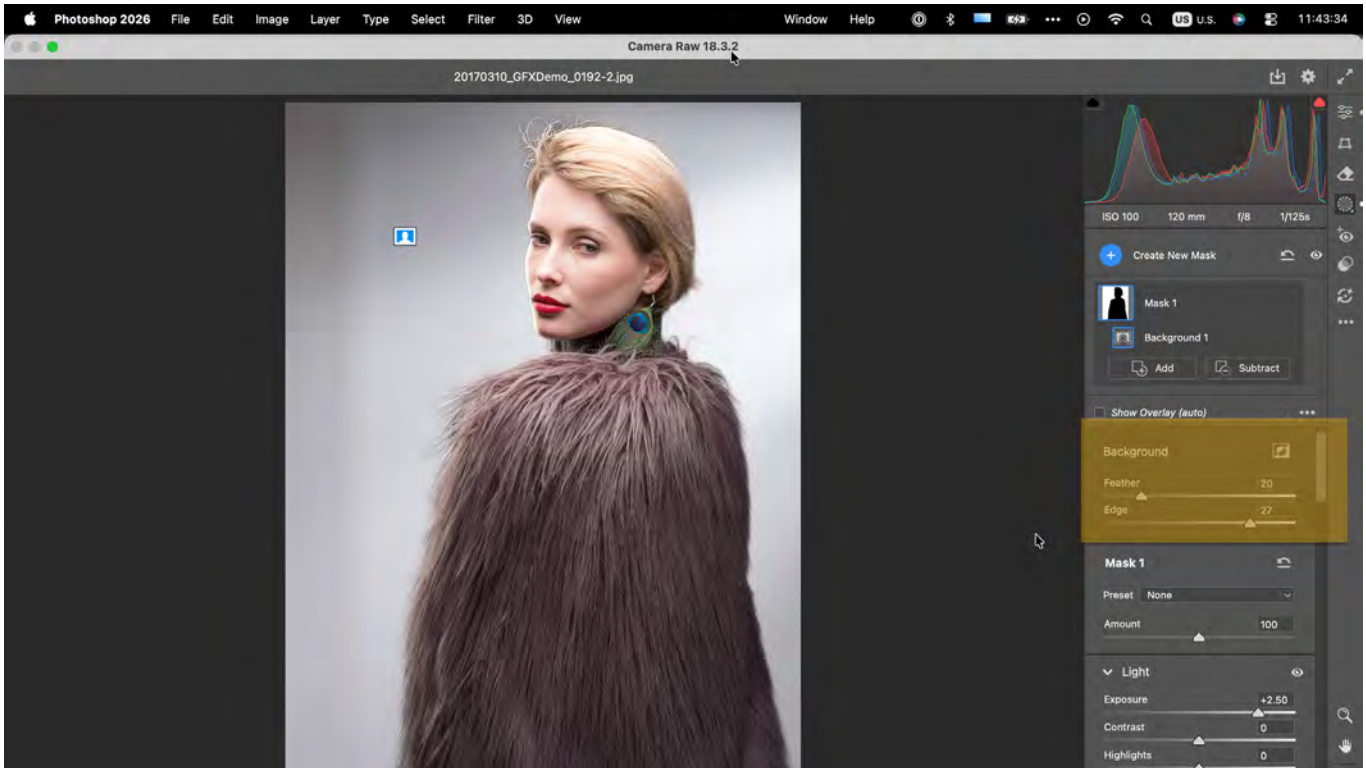


Using positive values for Feather and Shift Edge allowed me to select more of the dark feathers, while avoiding halos.

These controls apply to Select Sky, Select Subject, Select Background, all Landscape masks and People masks. They don't appear for linear or radial gradients, which already have their own feathering. Unfortunately, they also don't work on Brush masks. You can already feather a Brush mask before starting to paint, but it would have been cool to be able to feather it afterwards. Something I regret more is that these controls are also not available in Object Selections, which I use a lot in my workflow.

Brightening a very dark studio background (see inset) by 2.5 stops in post-production is never a good idea, especially when your model is wearing something like this. The result with the standard Subject selection is grey fringes at the edges and the hair.





While still far from perfect, playing around with the Shift Edge and Feather sliders provided a better result.

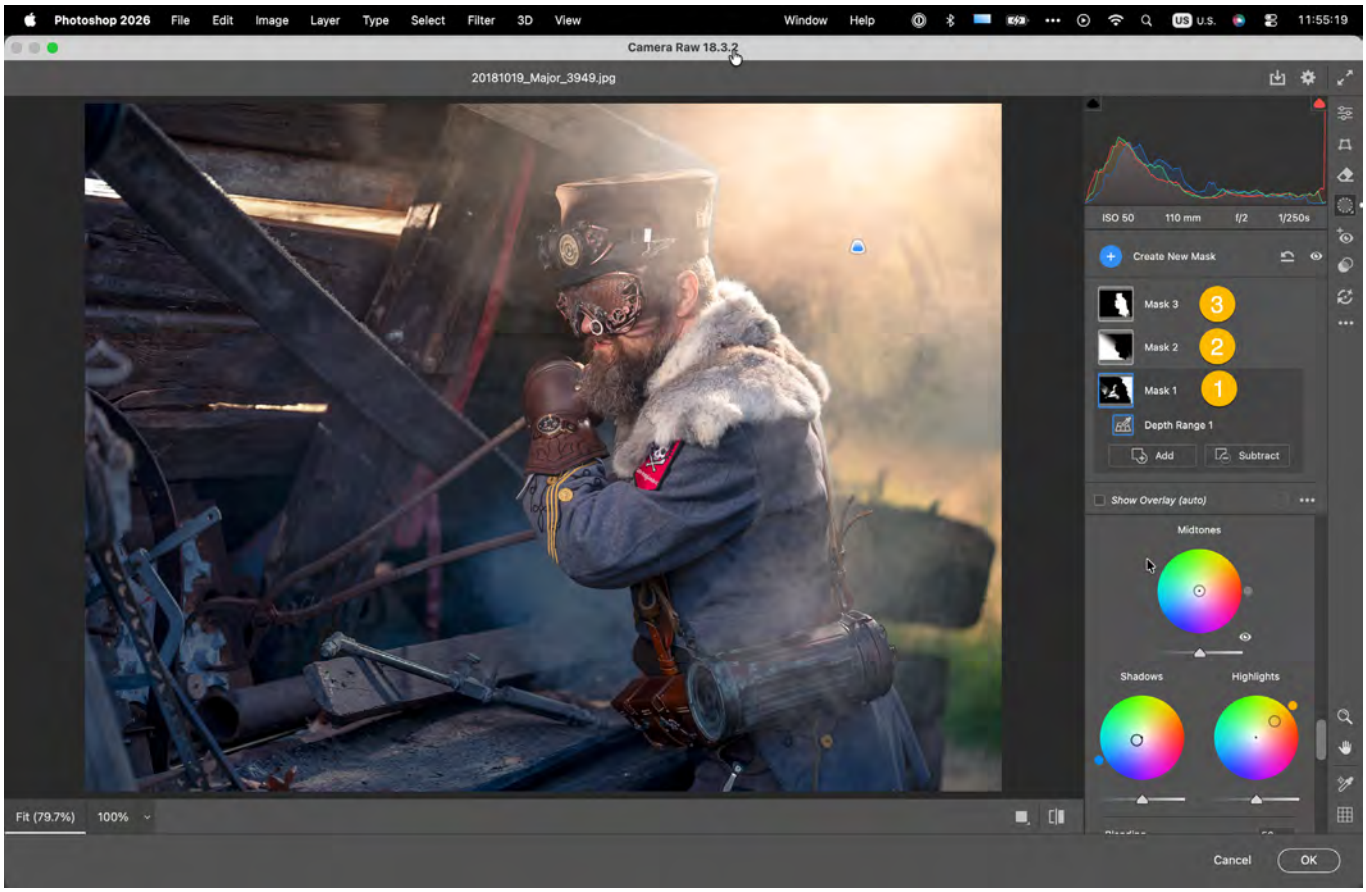
LOCAL COLOUR GRADING: FINALLY, COLOUR GRADING MAKES SENSE

If you've used Lightroom's colour grading panel (the three-way Shadows / Midtones / Highlights colour wheels), you'll know how powerful it can be. You'll also know its limitation: it's entirely global. There's no way to say "cool down the highlights in the sky, but warm the ones on the subject's face". The wheels affect everything all at once.

CAMERA RAW NOW PUTS THOSE SAME THREE-WAY COLOUR WHEELS INSIDE EVERY MASK.

Now you can warm up just the brighter tones inside a sky or depth range mask without affecting the tones on a subject's face below, or you can cool the dark tones of a background mask while pushing the midtones of a separate subject mask in the opposite direction. For Fujifilm shooters: if you're drawn to the cinematic, film-like looks that Film Simulations already give you in-camera, local colour grading will feel like a natural extension of that.

Why use one mask when you can make three? I used the new Depth map feature to select the background and tint the highlights warm and the shadows cool (**1**). I used a linear gradient from which I subtracted a Subject selection(**2**) to make the shadows to the left of the foreground even cooler. Finally, I made a subject selection and cooled down the Shadows and warmed up the highlights (**3**).



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR LIGHTROOM USERS

At the time of writing, none of this is in Lightroom Classic or the Lightroom cloud-based app yet. If the past is an indicator, though, these features will come to Lightroom sooner or later. They almost *have* to because of the way both apps work together when passing files from Lightroom to Photoshop and back.

If you want access to these tools already now and you're a Lightroom Classic user, there's a workaround: finish your basic editing in Lightroom Classic, save the metadata to the file (Metadata > Save Metadata to File, or Cmd+S on Mac / Ctrl+S on Windows), then open the image in Camera Raw via Photoshop or Bridge. Your Lightroom edits will carry across. From there, you can apply depth masks, edge refinements and local colour grading. When Lightroom eventually catches up, reading the updated metadata from the file via Metadata > Read Metadata from file should update your file. In the meantime, though, your edits won't show in the Develop module.

An easier, less convoluted alternative is to apply your basic edits in Lightroom, then send the image over to Photoshop via Photo > Edit in > Open as Smart Object in Photoshop, apply the Camera Raw filter as a Smart Filter via Filter > Camera Raw Filter and use the new features there. It creates bigger files, but the benefit is that your Camera Raw filter edits will be visible in Lightroom when you save the file in Photoshop. It's the way I created the screenshots in this article using images from my Lightroom Classic catalogue. Or… you can just be patient until Adobe decides to add all these goodies to Lightroom!

ONE LENS, THREE CENTURIES: HOW THE XF18-135MMF3.5-5.6 BECAME THE PERFECT TIME MACHINE

Going through old hard drives is a particular kind of time travel. I recently came across this set of images from a September 2015 trip to the Fortress of Louisbourg – one of my earliest serious shoots after making the jump to Fujifilm. Looking at them again, I was immediately reminded why I fell so hard for the 18-135mm zoom. It was the first lens I bought specifically for travel and it quickly became the one I couldn't take off the camera. Wide enough for sweeping stone architecture, long enough for candid portraits, steady enough for dark interiors – it did everything I asked of it that day. Ten years on, these images still hold up. This article explores why.

The entrance of the fort at Louisbourg.
X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/11, 1/250 sec, ISO 200

The Fortress of Louisbourg is a living window into 18th-century colonial life, offering photographers an immersive blend of history, architecture and human storytelling. Painstakingly reconstructed on its original foundations, this sprawling seaside fort comes alive with costumed re-enactors (soldiers on patrol, bakers tending ovens, and townsfolk in daily routines, etc.), creating scenes that feel lifted from another century. The interplay of natural light on stone ramparts, cannon-lined walls and cobblestone streets adds cinematic depth to every frame. Whether capturing candid moments of life within the fortress or dramatic portraits against the backdrop of the Atlantic, Louisbourg offers a rare chance to photograph history as if it were happening right before your eyes. Now imagine doing all of that without once swapping a lens!

Living history sites demand a particular kind of photographer's discipline. Unlike a landscape shoot where you can take your time or a studio portrait session where you control every variable, a place like Louisbourg moves at the pace of 1744. Re-enactors slip in and out of doorways. A musician strikes

up a tune without warning. A soldier leans against a stone wall and the light is perfect for exactly thirty seconds before a cloud rolls in off the Atlantic.

This is exactly why the Fujifilm XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 earns its place as the single most useful lens you can own for this kind of work. This zoom covers a full-frame equivalent of roughly 27-206mm, spanning wide architectural views all the way to tight portrait compression. It's weather-resistant, optically stabilised and more compact than the red-badge medium zooms that have less range. More importantly, it lets you see Louisbourg the way its inhabitants once lived it, without interruption.

THE WIDE END: ARCHITECTURE & THE SENSE OF PLACE

At 18mm (27mm equivalent), the XF18-135mm is just wide enough to swallow Louisbourg whole. The fortress sprawls – stone ramparts, timber barracks, a chapel steeple that punches into dramatic Nova Scotia skies – and you need breathing room to do the architecture justice.

The massive King's Bastion barracks, with its long stone façade and distinctive bell tower, reward patience at the wide end. Shooting in the morning or late afternoon, when the sun rakes across the fieldstone at a low angle, pulls out the rough texture of the masonry in a way that makes the building look genuinely ancient rather than recently reconstructed.

King's Bastion barracks.
X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/22, 1/75 sec, ISO 250

The farmyard buildings (the carpenter's workshop with its shingle roof and the stone outbuildings surrounded by split-rail fencing) benefit from the slight compression even at the wide end when you're working close. At 18mm, you can include foreground interest (a fence line, a gravel path, a pile of rope, etc.) while still keeping the full building in frame.

Farmyard buildings.
X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/7.1, 1/680 sec, ISO 200

When 18mm isn't wide enough, you can always shoot a panorama.
X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/7.1, 1/680 sec, ISO 200

One practical note: the 18-135mm's autofocus is quick and confident in good light, which matters when you're composing rapidly and need the camera to keep up with you. On an X-T5 or X-H2, pairing the lens with subject-detection AF means you can compose loosely and let the camera handle focus acquisition, which is useful when a re-enactor steps unexpectedly into your frame!

The fisherman's cottage with the sudden appearance of the fisherman.
X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/14, 1/300 sec, ISO 400

MID-RANGE: CANDID STREET & DOCUMENTARY WORK

Zoom to around 50-85mm (75-130mm equivalent) and the lens finds its documentary voice. This is the range for working the interior street of the fortress (the row of merchant houses and military lodgings that lines the parade ground) without intruding on the scene.

The woman leaning from the window of a colonial dwelling, hands resting on weathered wood, is exactly the kind of shot that requires this focal length. You're close enough to read her expression – warm, inviting, the smile of someone who enjoys her work – but far enough back that she doesn't feel cornered. The depth of field at 85mm on the APS-C sensor is flattering without being aggressively shallow.

One of the re-enactors who works at the fort.
X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/5.6, 1/550 sec, ISO 400

He's playing to get released from prison.
X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/5.6, 1/950 sec, ISO 400

At these mid-range focal lengths, the XF18-135mm also handles the in-between moments well: the musician in period costume playing what appears to be a Baroque guitar, caught mid-song and clearly delighted by it, and the costumed figure who pauses in a doorway just long enough to become part of the architecture. These are photographs where you don't want to be noticed raising a camera, and a mid-range zoom gives you the distance to be a respectful witness rather than an intrusion.

LONG END: PORTRAITS & THE HUMAN ELEMENT

Zoom to 135mm (approximately 200mm equivalent) and the lens transforms into a portrait tool with genuine reach and pleasing compression. This is where Louisbourg photography gets its most intimate character.

The portrait of the female re-enactor (tricorn hat, musket held at the ready, positioned against the iron-studded fortress door) was made at the longer end of the zoom range. At this focal length, the stone wall behind her resolves into a softer texture rather than a competing element. The shallower depth of field slightly separates her from the background, while the compression pulls everything into a tighter, more painterly frame. The image achieves something almost cinematic: a portrait that could credibly pass for a frame from a historical drama.

Standing guard.
X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/5.6, 1/60 sec, ISO 400

The older craftsman standing by a leaded window, his white linen shirt catching the backlight and with a walking stick in hand, is another example of the long end doing quiet, powerful work. The slight telephoto compression keeps the proportions natural while the window light does most of the work. No flash, no modifier, no reflector. Just available light, the lens and the patience to wait for the subject to settle into his character.

Gentleman at the window.

X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/8, 1/75 sec, ISO 400

One of the more striking compositional opportunities the long end enables is shooting through architectural features; the iron grate in the heavy wooden door, with a face peering through, is a photograph that rewards the compression of a longer focal length. The grate's bars become sharp graphic elements and the face beyond them takes on a slightly compressed, confrontational presence. It's the kind of shot that would be lost at wider focal lengths, where the door would dominate and the face would shrink.

A practical note: the OIS (Optical Image Stabiliser) built into the 18-135mm is doing real work. Handheld at 1/30s or slower in dim interiors, you'll find sharp files that would have required a tripod with a non-stabilised lens.

The prisoner awaits his release.
X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/5.6, 1/15 sec, ISO 1600

INTERIORS: WHERE THE ZOOM EARNS ITS KEEP

The interior spaces at Louisbourg present some of the most technically demanding photography on site, and the 18-135 handles them with unexpected grace. The ship carpenter's workshop is a cathedral of timber and curve – a boat hull under construction on supports, wood shavings carpeting the floor and the light from multi-paned windows cutting across the scene in sharp diagonal shafts. This is a room that rewards the wide end for establishing shots (18mm captures the full length of the hull and the soaring roof structure in a single frame) but benefits from the mid-range zoom when you want to isolate the craftsmanship – the elegantly bent ribs of the hull, the scattering of tools and shavings, and the quality of the joinery.

The shipbuilder's workshop.

X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/3.5, 1/60 sec, ISO 1600

The storehouse filled with oak barrels and coiled rope is a more intimate interior space, and here the challenge is contrast management. The windows blow out easily against the darker walls. At 18-24mm, the vertical lines of the stacked barrels create a strong compositional rhythm leading back to the windows.

X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/3.5, 1/25 sec, ISO 1600

The merchants' quarters.
X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/8, 1/40 sec, ISO 1600

The wide end earns its place immediately in a room like the merchant's quarters – a low-beamed dining room with pewter-stacked dressers, rush-seated chairs and a trestle table set as if the household stepped out moments ago. At 18mm, you can pull in the full sweep of the space: exposed ceiling beams, windows on three walls and the cast iron pot on the hearth in the corner. The available light is soft and directional, and the wide angle captures the layered depth of the room without distortion.

Step into the working kitchen and the scene changes entirely. A re-enactor sits at a preparation table surrounded by wooden bowls, ceramic crocks and fresh ingredients, with the great fireplace dark and sooty behind her, dried herbs hanging from the ceiling, and the window at her back providing the only light source. This is where the zoom's mid-range does its best portrait work. It's far enough back to include the fireplace, the hanging pots and the shelf of preserves that tell the full story of the room, but tight enough that her expression – watchful, composed, fully in character – anchors the frame. The backlit window creates a natural exposure challenge, but keeping it slightly blown holds the mood rather than flattening it.

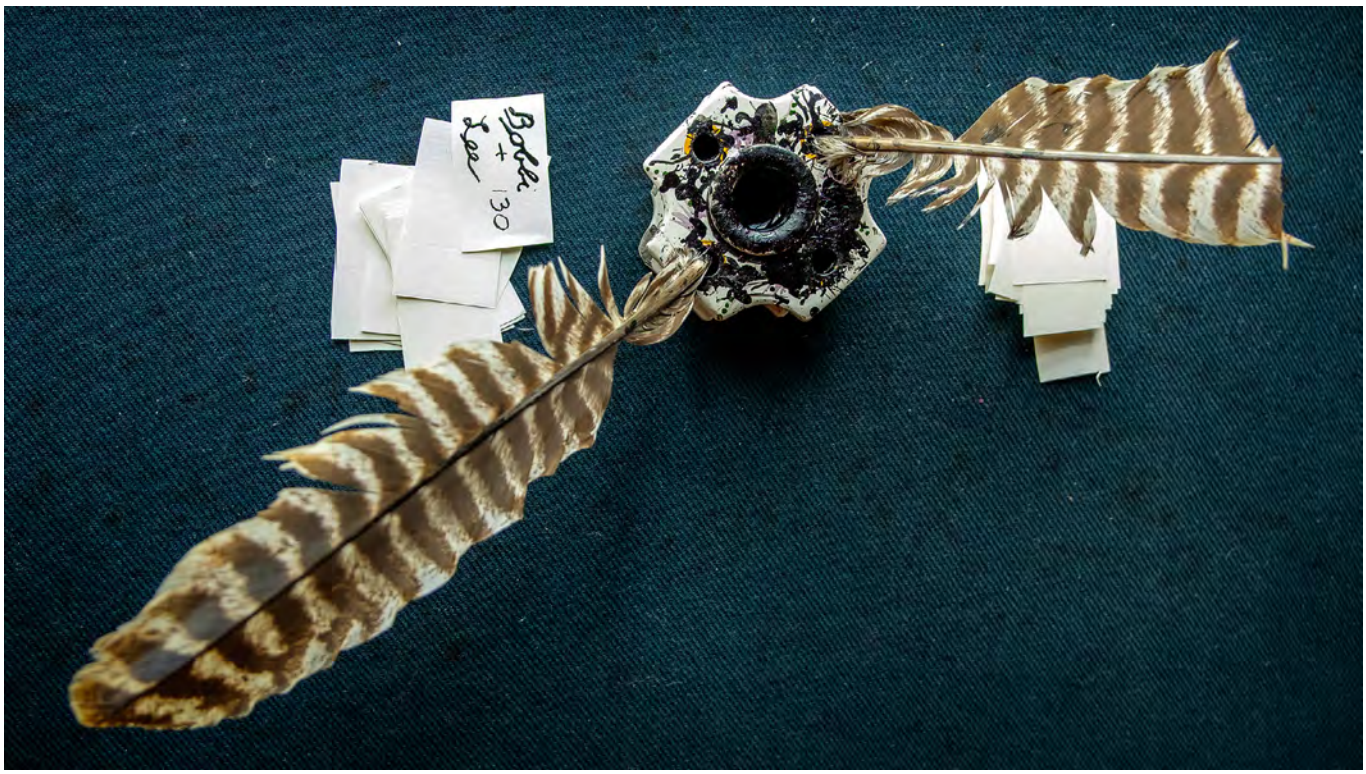
The kitchen.
X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/8, 1/40 sec, ISO 1600

THE MACRO YOU DIDN'T PACK: DETAIL WORK AT 135MM

One of the quiet surprises of a medium zoom like the 18-135mm is what happens when you push to the long end and move in close. It won't replace a dedicated macro lens, but at 135mm with minimum focus distance, you can isolate small subjects with enough magnification and subject separation to make genuinely compelling detail shots. On a day when you're committed to one lens, that matters.

Both of these images were made without moving to a different lens. The bobbin lace-making pillow – with dozens of wooden bobbins radiating outward like spokes, silver thread catching the light as the lacemaker's hands work through the pattern – is exactly the kind of intricate, tactile subject that rewards a longer focal length at close range. Shooting from above at 135mm compresses the scene just enough to make the geometry feel deliberate, while the shallow depth of field renders the dark table as a clean, unobtrusive foundation. You're close enough to read the handwritten pattern notes on the small card pinned to the pillow.

Bobbin, lace-making pillow.
X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/4, 1/80 sec, ISO 1250



Quill and inkwell.
X-T1 + XF18-135mmF3.5-5.6 at f/3.5, 1/240 sec, ISO 1250

The quill-and-inkwell still life takes a different approach – a deliberate, almost flat-lay composition of period writing implements on dark fabric and the barred feathers of the quill drawing a diagonal line across the frame. At 135mm with careful positioning, the lens renders the inkwell's ceramic glaze and ink-stained surface with enough detail to feel tactile. The background falls away to an even, unbroken tone that a wider focal length simply couldn't deliver from the same working distance.

Neither shot announces itself as a zoom compromise. They hold up because at the long end, close in, a good medium zoom stops feeling like a convenience and starts feeling like a choice.

PRACTICAL NOTES FOR YOUR VISIT

Louisbourg rewards an early start. The re-enactors are typically in character by mid-morning, but the first hour after opening sees fewer visitors, better light and a more relaxed pace that makes candid portraiture easier. The fortress faces roughly northeast, so morning light hits the King's Bastion façade beautifully. By afternoon, the parade ground is in mixed light and the interiors see their best window illumination.

A single body with the 18-135 attached is genuinely sufficient for a full day's shooting. Bring extra batteries; the X Series bodies are not exceptional for battery life, especially when using the EVF extensively. The weather resistance on the lens and bodies means a passing fog or light rain is a feature, not an obstacle.

Most importantly, slow down. The best photographs at Louisbourg are not the ones you sprint for; they're the ones you wait for.

The Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site is located on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, Canada and is operated by Parks Canada. The fortress is open seasonally, typically from late May through October. Bobbi and I are leading a Photo-Adventure to Nova Scotia, October 1 – 8, 2026. We will be spending a day at the Fort at Louisbourg – join us for a spectacular Fall Colors photo tour.

IS YOUR LCD SHAPING YOUR PHOTOGRAPHS?

Hands stuck through a fence, holding the camera in the middle of a plant to get the desired angle? That's where the rear LCD shines!
X-T50 + Sigma 17-40mmF1.8 Art at 17mm, f/2.8, 1/2000 sec, ISO 125

In this article, I want to explore the types of rear LCD screens that Fujifilm fits to its current range of cameras and the role that they play in our photography. Each type of screen has its pros and cons technically as well as creatively, and each photographer more than likely has their preference of which one works best for them. Indeed, some are quite vocal on the Internet. This is just my exploration of them and your mileage may vary!

Obviously, no screen will force you to take photographs in a particular way and on most cameras, you still have the option of using a combination of the EVF and your flexibility/dexterity to achieve different angles. Here, I'll be discussing the subconscious nudges and encouragement that each type of screen brings to photography, based on my own experience with them and discussions with fellow photographers.

Eye level and looking through the viewfinder. This is the playground of the X-Pro3. The screen makes it difficult to do anything other than review images.

X-Pro3 + XF33mmF1.4 at f/1.4, 1/70 sec, ISO 1600

TYPE 1: HIDDEN SCREEN

Let's start with probably the most divisive of Fujifilm's offerings to date: the flip-down screen of the X-Pro3. This screen folds flush to the camera and remains hidden until it is flipped down. Some would say that this defeats the purpose of a digital camera. Others would say that it forces you to use the camera in a more traditional way. Whatever your stance, the marketing hype this generated was quite something. Everyone had an opinion!

With the screen folded closed, the X-Pro3 has to be used at eye level. If you want another angle, you need to move your head to the location you want to shoot from. In this sense, those who say it takes you back to basics have a point. Whether or not that is beneficial to the way you like to work, only you can say.

With the screen flipped out, the camera becomes quite uncomfortable to hold with two hands. Also, because the screen only flips down, high angles or vertical shots are almost equally as much guesswork as they are with the screen closed.

This type of screen mostly encourages low angles and image review. It definitely does the intended job of pushing the photographer towards a traditional style of photography. It is perhaps even more restrictive than having the fixed screen we saw on early digital cameras.

TYPE 2: TILT SCREEN

The second type of screen is the one found on many older Fujifilm bodies and is currently still in use on cameras like the X-T50 and X100VI. This is the tilt-type LCD. Its implementation has varied slightly over time, but the current version tilts up to 90° to allow low-angle shooting and down around 45° to allow overhead shooting. This type of screen only tilts up and down with respect to a horizontally oriented camera.

A low angle, just above the level of the puddle, without getting my knees or anything else soaked? Yes, please!
X100V at f/8, 1/750 sec, ISO 320

Inside the handrails on the subway staircase? Don't mind if I do!

X100VI at f/2, 1/60 sec, ISO 125

When the camera is held horizontally, the screen can be flipped up or down to allow for high and low angles to be had without the need to bend down or physically get higher up. For anyone with mobility issues, this is a godsend. For those who like to shoot from the hip to go unnoticed, it's a fantastic tool. For getting up above a crowd or a fence, it's a boon.

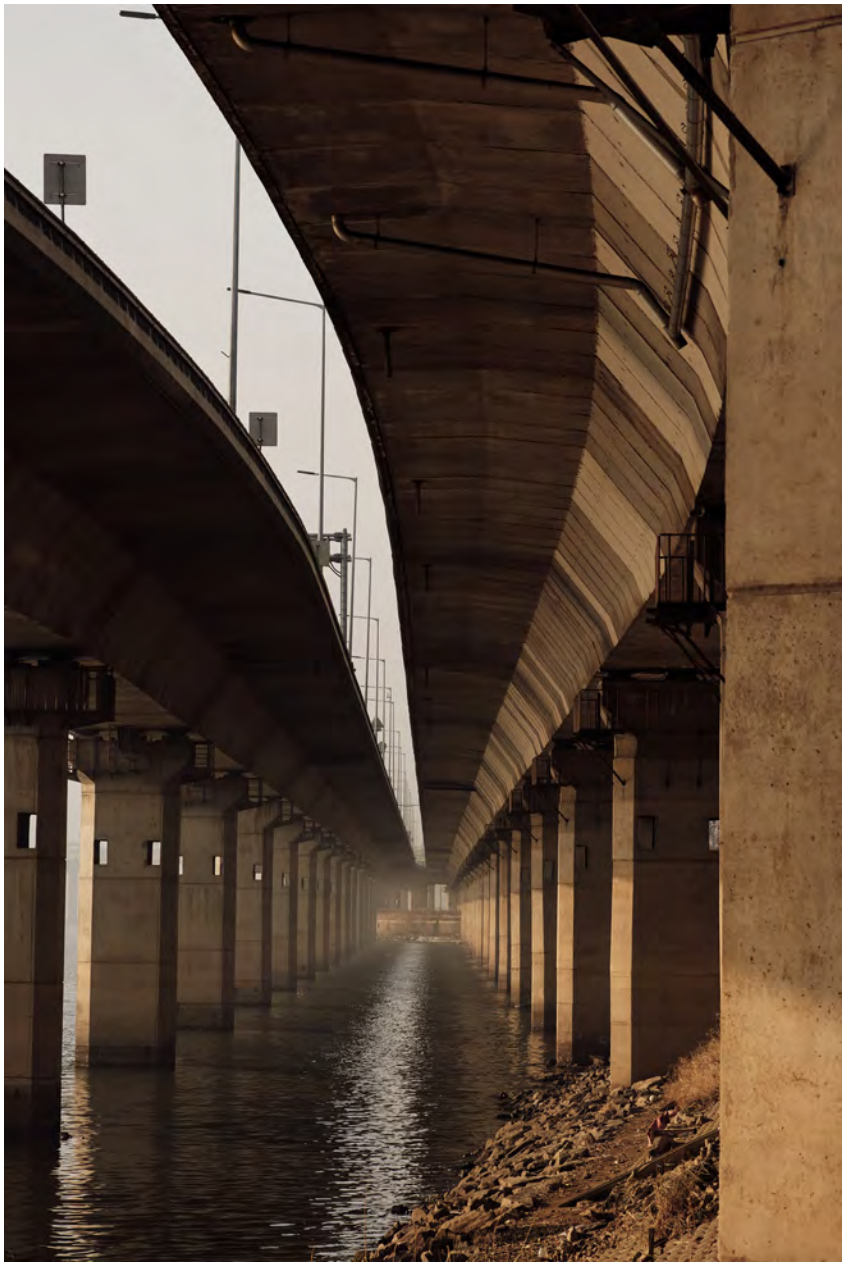
All of these angles are possible with an EVF. They're all possible with a little bit of guesswork and practice without looking at the screen. However, I have personally found that since owning a camera with this type of screen, more of my images have been from low and high angles. The screen has given my subconscious a nudge and said, "Hey, what if you raised the camera over your head?"

When I work with this type of LCD, I find myself searching out angles I may not have considered otherwise. I place my camera down close to a puddle, close to the floor for a heroic angle, or up above my head to keep vertical lines straight when photographing buildings or trees.

TYPE 3: TILT-FLIP SCREEN

The third type of screen takes the tilt screen and gives it one more trick. Not only can this screen be tilted up and down in horizontal orientation, but in vertical orientation, it gains the ability to be tilted approximately 60° again. This allows the same high and low angles to be made in vertical orientation without having to make a groaning noise and bend over.

This is excellent for raising the camera up to keep vertical lines straight, finding the height where your subject doesn't intersect the horizon or placing the camera down low to lend your subject some presence. Again, these are all possible without the screen, but with the LCD tilted out like this, you're able to see the scene clearly and accurately compose your images.



One-handed, up above my head: all just to keep the lines as straight as possible.

X-T5 + Samyang 75mmF1.8 at f/8, 1/125 sec, ISO 125

Much like the standard tiling screen, this tilting and flipping screen has the effect of encouraging the photographer to seek out alternate angles. I come home with far more vertical compositions when I work with my X-T5 than I do with my X-T50, for example. Just knowing in the back of my mind that I can go high or low with the X-T5 gives me the push I need to look for those angles.

Raising the camera into the branches of the tree here allowed me to add just a bit of additional interest to this composition of the five-storied pagoda at Kōfukuji.

X-T5 + TTArtisan 56mmF1.8 AF at f/8, 1/125 sec, ISO 200

TYPE 4: FULLY ARTICULATING SCREEN

Then there is the final option that Fujifilm offers. This one is often found on video-centric or hybrid cameras like the X-H2 series and X-S series. This screen has a pivot point on the left-hand side of the body that allows it to be flipped outside of the camera body to the left and then rotated 270° around that point.

This type of screen provides a selfie view for vlogging without the need for an external monitor. Aside from that, it simply offers another way to access all the various angles that the tilt-flip screen offers but with different ergonomics.

A nice low angle without having to bend down too far.
X-T4 + XF18mmF1.4 at f/1.4, 1/8000 sec, ISO 160

For photographers, this screen encourages working at all sorts of different angles, just like the previous screen type. However, in order to get the screen at any angle other than flush against the camera body, it needs to be first flipped outside the camera. This makes getting a good grip on the camera with two hands in horizontal orientation more cumbersome than the previous screen type.

It also means that the screen is off-centre in this orientation. Personally, this makes it quite difficult for me to get level shots with straight lines. So, rather than encouraging me to use the screen, I find composition easier through the viewfinder with this screen type, resulting in more eye-level shots (a bit like the X-Pro3).

Low and vertical is easy with this type of screen.

XH2S + XF18mmF1.4 at f/1.4, 1/25,600 sec, ISO 160

For high and low shots in vertical orientation, though, it is ergonomically equal to the previous screen type and gives the brain that same nudge, with a small caveat. Almost every photographer I've spoken to who has used this type of screen has shared a variation of the same sentiment: there is a barrier between you and flipping the screen out. There is some kind of micro-laziness that kicks in when the screen has to be flipped outside of the camera body before being rotated into position. Presumably, this isn't an issue for everyone, or Fujifilm may not have included it on so many cameras!

Hopefully, if nothing else, this discussion has given you a moment to pause and consider if and how the LCD on your camera affects your photography. If you've noticed it, then you can actively try to override the mental nudges the camera gives you and be mindfully creative.

"Your worst enemy cannot harm you as much as your own thoughts unguarded." – The Buddha

Happy shooting!

Finally, an image photographed kneeling down and looking through the viewfinder.

X100V at f/2, 1/400 sec, ISO 320

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